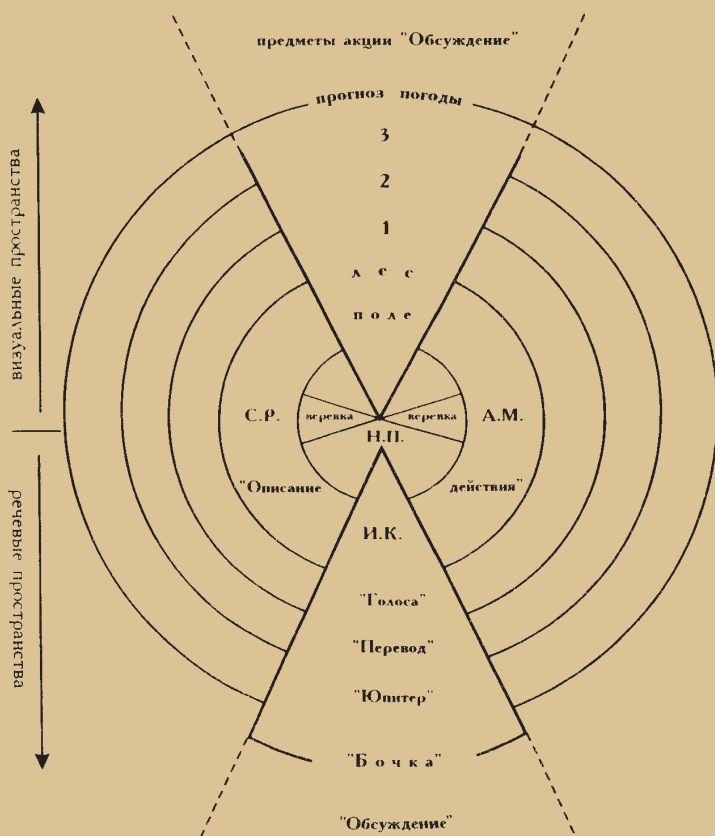


TRANSITION IN POST-SOVIET ART

THE
COLLECTIVE
ACTIONS
GROUP
BEFORE
AND AFTER
1989

OCTAVIAN
EȘANU

WITH A FOREWORD
BY BORIS GROYS



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TRANSITION IN POST-SOVIET ART

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The Collective Actions Group Before and After 1989

OCTAVIAN EȘANU

Foreword by Boris Groys

With an abridged translation of the *Dictionary of Moscow
Conceptualism*



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TO THE MEMORY OF **VASILISA TALMAȚHII**
(1915–1991)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	X
CREATING A CLEARING: Foreword by Boris Groys	XIII
PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	1
PART I: A General Introduction to KD and Moscow Conceptualism	15
Chapter 1. A Bibliographic Overview	17
The Literature Before 1989	23
The Literature After 1989	33
The Consolidation of the Discursive Field of Moscow Conceptualism	37
Chapter 2. Mapping Moscow Conceptualism	49
The Attribute “Romantic”	63
The Central Concept of “Emptiness”	72
PART II: Transition: From KD to [KD]	87
Chapter 3. KD’s Journeys Before 1989	89
Volume I (1976–80): <i>Appearance</i>	92
Volume II (1980–83): <i>Ten Appearances</i>	107
Volume III (1983–85): <i>Discussion</i>	122
Volume IV (1985–87) and Volume V (1987–89)	137
Chapter 4. “During”: The Transition to Capitalism	173
Transition and Transitology	175
The Cultural Transition: The SCCA Model	184

Chapter 5. [KD]'s Journeys After 1989	199
Temporality of Transition	201
New Schizo-Terms in the <i>Dictionary</i>	205
Bracketed Totality: From KD to [KD]	211
From Numerology to Statistics	220
From Action to Installation	229
From Descriptions to Projects	243
Kievogorskoe Field: From No Man's Land to Housing Development	255
A More Comfortable Journey: From Public to Private Transportation	267
The Democratization of Language	270
 AFTERWORD: From KD to [KD]: From Objectivation to Reification	 279
 APPENDIX: <i>Dictionary of Moscow Conceptualism</i>	 291
Preface by Andrei Monastyrsky	
<i>Dictionary of Moscow Conceptualism</i>	295
(Main Section)	
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 329
INDEX	345

LIST OF FIGURES

1.	Vadim Zakharov, <i>History of Russian Art from the Russian Avant-Garde to Moscow Conceptualism</i> . Installation, 2004.	44
2.	Ekaterina Dyogot, "Classification of Moscow Conceptualism," 1991. Translated and reconstructed by Octavian Eșanu in 2009.	59
3.	Ilya Kabakov, Diagram of "Hope" and "Fear," circa 1980. (Kabakov 1999, p. 63) Reconstructed by Octavian Eșanu in 2008.	68
4.	Ilya Kabakov, <i>In the Closet</i> , 1973, and Kasimir Malevich, <i>Black Square</i> , ca. 1923. (Wallach and Kabakov, 1996, p. 116; Kazimir Malevich et al., 1993, p. 48)	84
5.	Andrei Monastyrsky, <i>Ten Appearances</i> . Diagram, 1981. (Monastyrsky 1998, p. 138) Reconstructed by Octavian Eșanu in 2008.	111
6.	Andrei Monastyrsky, <i>The Position of the Objects, the Spectators and the Organizers during the Action "Discussion."</i> Diagram, 1985. (Monastyrsky 1998, p. 388) Translated and reconstructed by Octavian Eșanu in 2008.	123
7.	Andrei Monastyrsky, <i>The Arrangement of the Spectators on Kievogorskoe Field</i> . Diagram, 1989. (Monastyrsky 1998, p. 675) Reconstructed by Octavian Eșanu in 2008.	146
8.	Andrei Monastyrsky, <i>The Position of the Objects on the Desk Project for the Installation "Journey to the West,"</i> 1989 (Monastyrsky 1998, p. 775) Reconstructed by Octavian Eșanu in 2009.	233

9. Andrei Monastyrsky, *Earth Works*. Diagram, 1987. (Monastyrsky 1998, p. 541). Reconstructed by Octavian Eşanu in 2009. **235**
10. Andrei Monastyrsky, *The Interrelation of the Demonstrative Fields in KD's Series of Actions "The Perspective of Speech Act."* Diagram, 1985. (Monastyrsky 1998, p. 411) Reconstructed by Octavian Eşanu in 2009. **236**
11. Andrei Monastyrsky, *Show-window, Installation with the third volume of "Journeys Outside the City."* Installation, 1990. **242**
12. Kievogorskoe Field in 1989 and in 2001, maps. Assembled from Andrei Monastyrsky, *The Arrangement of the Spectators on Kievogorskoe Field*. Diagram, 1989 and A. Monastyrsky 625–520, map, 2001. Reconstructed by Octavian Eşanu in 2009. **263**

FOREWORD

Creating a Clearing

BORIS GROYS

Few are the reliable and well-written books that seek to tell the history of recent art in Eastern Europe—that is, the history of work by the artists who crossed the line in time that divided the old, communist era from the new postcommunist one. The communist past as experienced by those who lived it is largely a foreign concept to the majority of art historians in the West, who thus tread hesitantly over its uncanny terrain. As for the new generations of Eastern European art historians, they have already partially forgotten this past or even actively suppressed the memory of it. Thus, Octavian Eșanu's book *Transition in Post-Soviet Art: The Collective Actions Group Before and After 1989* is exceptional in many ways. It presents a thoroughly reliable, well-researched narrative of the transformations that art in the eastern reaches of Europe has undergone since the demise of communism. These transformations are demonstrated by the example of the group of artists dubbed Collective Actions that has been active in Moscow from the middle of the 1970s to the present day.

Here we might ask: why this group? Why analyze and judge such a wide-ranging historical process by its effects on the activities of only one group of artists? Several reasons account for why such a choice should be immediately plausible to an informed reader. Collective Actions group was in operation throughout the entire period of transformations that led from the state-controlled economy to the emergence of the free market, including also the emergence of an art market. In this sense the group is exceptional indeed. Moreover, it would be difficult to find other groups of artists—at least in Russia—that kept their artistic practices going continuously notwithstanding the drastic changes in their economic and political contexts. Of course, it might be argued that Collective Actions succeeded in surviving communism because the group remained programmatically marginal during the whole period of its existence—operating on the borders of the Soviet official economic and political system and remaining

also on the margins of the new, capitalist Russia and its privately driven art market. The members of the group, and especially its leader, Andrei Monastyrsky, have always spoken about the production of emptiness as the foremost objective of their artistic activity. Such an aspiration seems to be nonpolitical indeed. Thus, at first glance this group's activities do not seem suitable enough for the study of its economic, political, and ideological contexts. In fact, the opposite is true. Emptiness creates transparency. It shifts the gaze of the spectator from the art object to its surroundings—temporal, spatial, social, economic, political.

Indeed, only if an individual completely rejects all the explicit forms of dependence on the cultural, ideological, and political values that dominate the society in which this individual lives can one start a discourse that would thematize the hidden, unconscious, implicit dependence of this individual on the technical, material, and political context of his or her existence—including the context of this individual's act of self-liberation itself. Put another way, only if an individual becomes “nothingness” does the context of his or her existence become transparent, visible. Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1913) was a symbol of radical reduction and annihilation of all the conscious, visible contexts of art in the name of its radical liberation from traditions and conventions of professional art-making. However, during the later period of his life Malevich had to accept the existence of art's invisible or, rather, necessarily overlooked determining factors. In his text on the additional element in *Black Square*, Malevich speaks about “bacilli” that infect the artistic vision in an unconscious way. The infection by the outside world remains—even if this world itself is reduced to nothingness. In fact, Malevich praises this unconscious infection through the outside world because it makes art contemporaneous with the reality in which it is created. The title of the group exhibition at which Malevich exhibited his Suprematist work, including *Black Square*, was *0.10*—indicating that it presented ten artists who had gone through point zero, through the experience of emptiness and nothingness.

In his book Eşanu mentions the influence of Malevich and, in general, the Russian avant-garde on Collective Actions. He also mentions that *Black Square* was a starting point for Ilya Kabakov, an influential figure in the group's establishment and activities. In the early 1970s Kabakov produced a series of albums under the collective title *10 Characters*—an obvious reference to the *0.10* exhibition. The albums depict the life and work of fictional marginal artists—those reduced to the status of social

nothingness. These lonely, provincial artist-heroes can, of course, to some degree be seen as pseudonyms or alter egos of Kabakov himself. Nonetheless, the distanced and ironic treatment of these fictitious characters in Kabakov's albums should by no means be taken as just simulated. Kabakov only partially identifies with the protagonists of his narratives, and his adoption of certain artistic poses often has only an ironic motive. In effect, he is constantly playing a game that oscillates between identification and nonidentification with his heroes. Kabakov's first major installation in the West was also called *Ten Characters* (shown in 1988 in the Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York). The installation space of *Ten Characters* was made to look like a typical Soviet communal apartment where the former residents had left behind some nondescript rubbish that should really have been cleared away. Under the impression of this and many of his other installations, some critics understood Kabakov's art as depicting the reality of Soviet communal apartments in which families were forced to live together. However, *Ten Characters* as well as Kabakov's other installations depict abandoned, peopleless spaces. The artists who lived and worked in the communal apartment depicted in *Ten Characters* have disappeared. One can see only the traces of their living presence, the context in which they spent their lives. Kabakov's communal apartment is a metaphor of the museum—and at the same time a critique of the museum. It is a metaphor of the museum because every museum is a posthumous communal apartment that brings together bodies of works by various artists. But Kabakov's artists leave almost no works behind. They haunt the installation space instead of filling it. And it is precisely this "zero point" of art, this spectral absence of the artists, that makes the space itself visible and memorable.

Collective Actions built a community—one whose nature is, among other things, spectral. Its members presented themselves to spectators as ghosts, apparitions, specters on the white surface of a snowy field on the outskirts of Moscow. They did not perform—they haunted. We have at our disposal only the documentation of these apparitions. If performance art has as its goal the creation of a feeling of presence, its documentation only stresses the absence of this feeling. Notwithstanding the growing popularity and public presence of Collective Actions, its exhibitions documenting its onetime actions, its performance art, thus function more as rituals of mourning—mourning of past events—rather than as their representations or recreations.

However, Collective Actions' performances happily eluded any outright association with mourning. Indeed, for Monastyrsky the true goal of his art to begin with was its documentation. The initial practice of art or, rather, the action itself is for him always but a ghostly, fleeting moment in time that leaves the participants perplexed and confused—they don't quite understand when the action began, when it ended, and what actually happened. Thus, the action emerges as such and becomes visible, truly possible to experience only *postfactum*—only through its documentation, through the effort of memory and interpretation. The presence of the action invariably comprises a flashback—the possibility for which Monastyrsky always thoroughly planned. Audience members were asked to describe their own experiences and propose their own interpretations. Later, all this written material was gathered and edited and supplemented with the photographs of the action and with Monastyrsky's subsequent commentaries. The originality of the action thus became secondary to its documentation—every documentation being not merely a representation of this action but a further contribution to its creation. If the original event was spectral, in other words, it acquired its reality only through the testimonies of its witnesses.

In other words, the spectrality of Collective Actions' artistic practice opened the eyes of spectators to the context of this practice, the ways in which it was documented, their own reaction to this context and documentation, and so forth. The reduction of the artistic gesture to (almost) nothing was a way to direct the public's attention to everything surrounding this gesture. Collective Actions created an open space inside the solid texture of Soviet reality—and made this reality visible to both its own members and others. The notion of a "clearing" as proposed by Heidegger to denote such a condition of openness was understood by Collective Actions almost literally—such a clearing being for its artists a snowy field on which apparitions appeared and disappearances occurred. That is why—even in an apparently paradoxical way—the artistic practice of Collective Actions is, indeed, a good point from which the Soviet reality and its transformation into post-Soviet Russia can be seen, understood, and described. Collective Actions created a clearing in this reality. And Octavian Eșanu had the courage and decisiveness to step into this clearing.

The result is a book that must be read by everyone who seeks to understand the fate of the artistic imagination in one of the most ideologically charged moments of the twentieth century.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In the late 1990s a Moscow-based institute for the study of culture investigated major changes that had occurred in the so-called “author’s song” (*avtorskaya pesnia*)¹—a semi-official genre engaged in by dissident singers during the Soviet period and very popular among the public. Its researchers concluded that during the transition from socialism to capitalism, some key shifts had unfolded on this front. Before 1989, a performer had to meet three main requirements to be called an “author” or “bard”: (1) the concert had to take place in an informal or unofficial location, often in an apartment or, when held for a larger group, around a campfire in a forest; (2) the lyrics had to be semantically complex “guitar poems,” as the songs were also called; (3) the author-singer wore the same kind of clothes as his or her audience. After 1989 none of these three criteria survived. During the transitional 1990s, once the singers began to perform in large and brightly lit concert halls, the verses began to deteriorate, becoming simple and straightforward, losing the semantic depth they had acquired over the years as singers had learned to conceal seditious meanings behind metaphors. Finally, the visual element underwent a marked change as well, as singers began to wear attire different than that of the public.

This example conveys the main objective of the present volume: to consider the modes of “transition” in the interstice between socialism and capitalism. After 1989, it became de rigueur in the West to discuss such transitions in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe predominantly in terms of economic and political significance. Over the past two decades, scholars of social and political sciences have analyzed the advent of market economics and representative democratic politics from various angles,

¹ In the “author’s song” (also called “guitar poetry”) the singer-guitarist is also the author of the lyrics and music. These songs were popular among dissident circles, and researchers have usually regarded them as semiofficial or “middle ground” to distinguish them from the criminal and camp “underground” song. For a discussion of this genre see, for example, Daphne Skillen, “[Untitled],” *The Modern Language Review* 81, no. 3 (1986).

yielding a broad range of opinions, methodologies, interpretations, and prescriptions on the impact and the progress of reforms. One perspective, however, has been treated less consistently—namely, the cultural and, even more specifically, the artistic and aesthetic one. While books about various new and old cultural and artistic manifestations in Eastern Europe and the former USSR before and after 1989 do exist, a more conclusive critical treatment—one that would aim at identifying more comprehensive patterns of change in artists' comportments and behaviors before and after 1989—may prove helpful for understanding what we might tentatively term the “artistic transition.”

One of the main objectives of this book, which was inspired by stories such as the one described in this preface, is to trace the impact of the socioeconomic transition on art, and conversely to consider the transition from a cultural perspective. *Transition in Post-Soviet Art: The Collective Actions Group Before and After 1989* seeks to identify major artistic and aesthetic transformations that took place in post-Soviet art after 1989. It does so by analyzing the aesthetic discourse constructed by the members of the Moscow-based artist group Collective Actions (hereafter abbreviated as KD, for the Russian *Kollektivnye deistvia*). For more than three decades these conceptual artists, part of a larger tradition known as Moscow Conceptualism, have been investigating the nature of art; developing their own methodology and tools; experimenting with various aesthetic and artistic approaches and strategies; and, finally, recording and collecting their findings, processes, conclusions, and interpretations into what today constitutes the ten-volume publication *Poezdki za gorod*, which I have translated as *Journeys Outside the City* (hereafter referred to as *Journeys*).² I have opted for the word “journeys” (for the Russian

2 The first five volumes of KD's *Journeys Outside the City* were published in 1998, and will henceforth be cited in this book as: Andrei Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: kollektivnye deistvia 1-5 vols.*, (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1998). I was kindly offered the second, at the time unpublished part of the Journeys by Andrey Monastyrsky on a CD-ROM. I cite it as: Andrei Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: "kollektivnye deistvia 6-10 vols."* (unpublished, unpaginated: 2008). Recently the ten-volume material has been partially published online and is available in both Russian and English at <http://conceptualism.letov.ru/KD-actions.html>. Various authors have translated the title of KD's *Poezdki za gorod* differently. Among the most common translations are: “Trips Outside the City,” “Country Walks,” “Travels to the Country,” “Journeys to the Countryside,” and “Travels Outside the City.” As previously noted, I translate KD's title as *Journeys Outside the City* and shall refer to it by the shortened form *Journeys*. All translations from the Russian are mine, unless indicated.

poezdki) instead of the perhaps more accurate English counterpart “trips” because the members of KD have regarded their expeditions into Moscow’s countryside above all as spiritual endeavors. My choice of “journeys” versus “trips” also has something to do with the attempt to express in English the romantic quality of their art, just as the attribute “romantic”—which often accompanies Moscow Conceptualism (as in Moscow Romantic Conceptualism)—has done since the late seventies. The word “trip” seems too prosaic and straightforward (as in “trips to the supermarket”) to be well-suited for KD’s *Journeys Outside the City*.

Each volume of the *Journeys* represents a temporal phase in the evolution of this group. The division of KD’s *Journeys* into ten progressive phases offers the possibility of investigating the evolution and the transformation of the group’s art and aesthetics chronologically. While I present KD’s aesthetic discourse within a historical context, the present work is neither strictly a history of this collective nor a monographic work but, rather, my own journey through the *Journeys*. As I proceed through this compendium of texts written by different authors over the course of three decades, I provide a more conclusive history of Moscow Conceptualism, of its “aesthetics of emptiness,” of the major concepts that have entered these artists’ discourse at various times, and of the most significant alterations. On the whole, this project aims to grasp some of the most notable transformations that took place in Eastern European art after the collapse of state socialism by closely considering one particular example: KD.

“Transition” has long been the key term used in referring to the radical social transformations that took place during the 1990s in Eastern Europe and the former USSR. Few, however, have noted that it has acquired its prominence throughout the entire post-Soviet space by way of a relatively new discourse called “transitology”—a new paradigm that emerged in the social and political sciences in the second half of the 1980s in order to account for the global political and social transformations taking place in Second and Third World countries. Throughout the last decade of the last century (which in this region has been also known as the “decade of transition”), transitology—the science of transition, in other words—became the hegemonic discourse that filled the ideological vacuum once occupied by Marxism-Leninism. Whereas in the West—and particularly in the United States, where the new paradigm emerged—it was known only to a small number of political scientists and government specialists, in post-

Soviet states it has been an explicit aspect of public discourse. Indeed, it has affected the lives of the masses, through numerous programs supported by Western governments or NGOs—programs that sought to radically change the behaviors of former socialist subjects in accordance with the rules of liberal democracy and the free market. More recently, beginning in 2011, the discourse of transition, or transitology, has resurfaced in those regions of the world affected by the Arab Spring.

This book addresses the effects of the socioeconomic transition on art and aesthetics. It does so by following KD's aesthetic discourse through its gradual evolution from the Soviet era to the Russian period. The history of the group is the history of its aesthetic system presented throughout the ten-volumes of the *Journeys*. Four artists—Andrei Monastyrsky (Sumnin) (Murmansk region, b. 1949), Nikita Alexeev (Moscow, b. 1953), Nikolai Panitkov (Vienna, b. 1950), and Georgii Kizevalter (Moscow, b. 1955)—formed KD in 1976 and worked together until 1989 when the group, which consisted at that time of eight members, disbanded. After six years of separation they reunited in 1995 under the name “[KD],” inserting the name in brackets. The group is still active to this day.

This abridged history of the group roughly overlaps with that of the USSR and, later, of Russia since the mid-1970s: 1976–1989, the final stage of the USSR and the beginning of Perestroika; 1989–1995, the collapse of USSR (1991) and the beginning of the transition to capitalism; and 1995–2008, the perpetuation of transition and attempts to re-invent Russia in the image of its former glory.³

KD's artistic strategy overlaps, in many respects, with that adopted by other members within the circle of Moscow conceptualists. As conceptual artists, the group's members have been primarily concerned with the investigation of the nature of art—attempting to grasp or even to discover what constitutes an authentic artistic and aesthetic experience. The group first became known in Moscow artistic circles for introducing a new genre of art, the *poezdka* (trip)—translated here as “journey.” These were short, one-day expeditions in which the artists invited their spectators to travel outside Moscow, most often to a particular meadow near the village of Kievsky Gorky on the city outskirts called *Kievogorskoe pole* (Kievogorskoe Field). During each journey the group organized an action (*aktsia*)—a

3 Though the group is still active today (2012), in this book I follow the evolution of their *Journeys* only until 2008.

form of artistic expression comparable to Western “happenings” in the late 1950s and “performances” in the 1970s and 1980s. KD’s actions, however, differed from the Western manifestations in that at the end of each action, the artists asked the spectators to engage in the process of interpretation—both by describing and reporting what they had witnessed and by analyzing the thoughts and reactions the action had triggered in them. The accumulated material—which consisted of documents and texts, commentaries and analyses, photographs, diagrams, and schemas—were collected and assembled chronologically in *Journeys Outside the City*. The first five volumes of the *Journeys* comprise the activity of the group during the Soviet period (1976–89), often described by the artists themselves as “classical KD” or the “compact period.” After a period of transition lasting six years (1989–1995) the group reunited and began to assemble material for the next volumes of the *Journeys* (1991–2008).⁴

This book is divided into two parts. Part One is a general introduction to Moscow Conceptualism and the role KD has occupied within this larger tradition. It begins this discussion with an overview of existing literature. Over the more than three decades at issue here, two distinct methodologies have prevailed, for Moscow Conceptualism emerged at the junction of visual art and literature. Chapter 1 groups bibliographical sources together according to the preference artists have accorded one approach or the other, explaining why a more visual method based on art historical interpretation prevailed before 1989 and a more abstract one based on literary criticism did afterward. Part One also analyzes the contribution of certain literature to the construction of a distinct cultural category called “Moscow Romantic Conceptualism.” It does so by examining how different sources have promoted this tradition over the decades, singling out this designation and separating it from other broadly established cultural labels such as “unofficial art” or “Soviet nonconformism” before 1989, and “contemporary Russian art” or “Russian actionism” in the years since.

⁴ The periodization of KD’s *Journeys* is as follows: the Soviet period, or Volume I (1976–80), Volume II (1980–83), Volume III (1983–85), Volume IV (1985–87), and Volume V (1987–89); and the Russian period, or Volume VII (1995–99), Volume VI (1991–94), Volume VIII (1999–2003), Volume IX (2003–06), and Volume X (2006–08). Monastyrsky refers to the first four volumes of the *Journeys* as “classical KD.” See the foreword to Volume Seven in Monastyrsky, “Poezdki za gorod: kollektivnye deistvia 6–10 vols.”

KD emerged as a part of Moscow Conceptualism in the mid-1970s, at a time when neither “Collective Actions” nor “Moscow Conceptualism” were as well established and known as they are today. In fact, the two names were used for the first time by the Russian art critic Boris Groys in one of his early texts,⁵ and the two nomenclatures are not only contemporaneous but also share a common ancestry. Indeed, one way to picture the relation between KD and Moscow Conceptualism is to imagine the latter as a circle of people (the artists and their spectators) who journeyed together outside the city (in the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s) to attend the group’s actions.⁶ More recently critics have argued that KD was the institution that contributed to the consolidation of Moscow Conceptualism into a distinct tradition, helping it secure what Russian artist Ilya Kabakov called its “field of consciousness.”⁷ KD helped Moscow Conceptualism acquire its distinct language, that is, and so the two phenomena cannot be considered apart.

Moscow Conceptualism began to consolidate into a distinct cultural entity after a split that occurred within Moscow’s unofficial art scene. The latter emerged as part of the “parallel polis” that began to form after the death of Stalin, and especially after the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students, which took place in Moscow in 1957.⁸ The relative openness of the capital city allowed local artists to obtain information about the international cultural phenomena beyond the Iron Curtain more quickly

⁵ Boris Groys, “Moscow Romantic Conceptualism,” *A-YA*, no. 1 (1979).

⁶ Monastyrsky estimates that the number of conceptualists in the seventies and the eighties did not exceed fifty persons. Andrei Monastyrsky, “Batiskaf kontseptualizma,” in *Die totale Aufklärung: Moskauer Konzeptkunst 1960–1990 / Total Enlightenment: Conceptual Art in Moscow 1960–1990*, ed. Boris Groys, Max Hollein, and Manuel Fontán del Junco (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2008), 18.

⁷ E. Bobrinskaia, “Kollektivnye deistvia kak institutsia,” *Khudozhestvennyi zhurnal* N 23, <http://www.guelman.ru/xz/362/xx23/xindx.htm> [accessed November 23, 2008].

⁸ The concept of “parallel polis” was introduced by the Czechoslovak *Charter 77* dissident writer Václav Benda in 1978 to describe unofficial economic, political, and cultural manifestations in the countries of the Soviet Bloc. See Václav Benda, “The Parallel ‘Polis,’” in *Civic Freedom in Central Europe: Voices from Czechoslovakia*, ed. H. Gordon Skilling and Paul Wilson (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991). The Moscow unofficial art scene had all the attributes of a “parallel polis,” an economic black market where artists sold their works, parallel information networks in which critics published unofficial criticism in the form of samizdat (self-publication) or tamizdat (publication abroad).

than could artists elsewhere in the USSR. Moscow Conceptualism launched its own distinct artistic and aesthetic paradigm during the 1970s in what was for the most part an imaginary dialogue with Western conceptual artists. In search of an artistic identity, its members produced a unique language with a distinct vocabulary of concepts and definitions that were later collected and assembled by KD's leader, Andrei Monastyrsky, into the *Dictionary of Terms of Moscow Conceptualism* (hereafter referred to as the *Dictionary*).⁹ The *Dictionary* (the main section of which the reader will find translated in this book's appendix) has been my second major source after the *Journeys*.¹⁰

The second chapter of Part One introduces some key concepts of Moscow Conceptualism, discussing their crucial importance for the tradition. For instance, it examines the attribute "romantic" which was used by Boris Groys to distinguish Moscow Conceptualism from its Western counterpart, and the concept of "emptiness" (*pustota*), placed by Ilya Kabakov at the center of this tradition, in relation to Moscow conceptualists' predecessors: the so-called "modernists of the 1950s and 1960s" and the Russian historical avant-garde of the 1920s. The Moscow conceptualists' relation to the historical avant-garde, in particular, has become an important subject of discussion. Critics and artists associated with this tradition have drawn upon this relationship to present Moscow Conceptualism, if not as the next avant-garde, then as the most elaborate and complex of recent Russian cultural phenomena. It has been often argued that the conceptualists articulated a critical response to their eminent predecessors, and that Moscow Conceptualism, with its social disengagement and distrust of politics—KD's aesthetics serving as an example—emerged as the most successful dialectical negation of the Russian avant-garde and its politically committed aesthetics.

Part Two focuses on transition. By definition, a transition is generally compressed between a "before" and an "after," and its understanding

9 Andrei Monastyrsky, *Slovar' terminov moskovskoi kontseptual'noi shkoly* [Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1999]. Note: The concepts from the Main Part of the *Dictionary of Moscow Conceptualism* are arranged following the Cyrillic alphabet, in accordance with the original Russian text.

10 For an illustrated and annotated translation and adaptation of this work, see Octavian Eșanu, *Dictionary of Moscow Conceptualism*, at <http://www.contemporary.org/project/view/14>. The book is also available on UbuWeb: <http://ubu.com/historical/moscow/index.html>.

requires a method akin to mathematical subtraction to obtain the difference. Today one can encounter the “before and after” formula mainly in the language of advertising, which uses it to promote various products (think for instance of that category of ads in which yellow teeth turn instantly white after being treated with a “new” product or process). But advertisers achieve the dramatic “before and after effect” by remaining largely silent as regards the “during” that constitutes the in-between phase and that often stands for the painful process of transformation and change of each “before” into its “after.” In the *Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin comments on Augustin Eugène Scribe and Roger de Rougemont’s play *Avant, pendant et après, esquisses historiques*, which premiered in Paris on June 28, 1828. According to Benjamin, the play is concerned with three phases of French history: “the first part of the trilogy [before] represents the society of the Ancien Régime, the second part [during] depicts the Reign of Terror, and the third part [after], takes place in the society of the Restoration period.”¹¹

Part Two is organized similarly to Benjamin’s conception of Scribe and de Rougemont’s play, according to the three-part structure of before, during, and after—a structure reflected in the titles of chapters corresponding to the three main periods in KD’s history. I have opted for this structure in order to more efficiently reveal the historical changes in KD’s artistic discourse under the impact of the post-Soviet transition—an all-encompassing social process that, as I shall argue, can be interpreted in terms of a break, a rupture, a historical *sdvig* (or “shift,” to evoke a concept used by Russian avant-garde poets and artists in their post-Revolution heyday to designate radical shifts or displacements on the level of poetic or artistic form).

Thus Chapter 3, titled “KD’s *Journeys* Before 1989,” examines the emergence and evolution of KD and its *Journeys* under the Soviet *ancien régime*; Chapter 4, titled “‘During’: Transition to Capitalism,” steps aside from the *Journeys* and from KD to briefly outline the discourse of Transitology and its relation to a new institutional mechanism of artistic liberalization supported by Western powers throughout the post-socialist region during the 1990s; and Chapter 5, “[KD]’s *Journeys* After 1989,” surveys the radical changes that occur during the “restoration” in the Russian volumes of the *Journeys*.

11 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland, and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), 39.

Chapter 3 introduces KD's aesthetic system as it evolved during the first five volumes of the *Journeys*. Divided into four sections that reflect the *Journeys*' table of contents, it sums up and analyzes a series of actions KD organized during its Soviet period. The chapter examines the main innovations that occurred during each subsequent phase by discussing the most frequently used concepts and devices, by describing some of the established rituals performed by the spectators and the artists, and by translating some of the artists' analyses and commentaries along with thoughts and impressions presented in spectators' written accounts. With frequent reference to the *Dictionary*, the chapter looks at the general structure of the *Journeys*, translating and explaining some of KD's central categories; for instance, the difference between the "spectator-participant" and the "anonymous spectator," as well as concepts crucial to the aesthetic of the group, such as "empty action," "empty photographs," "demonstrative fields," "exposition fields," and the "factographical discourse."

The chapter begins with a discussion of the first action KD organized, in 1976, describing the artists' actions and the spectators' reactions. With each new volume KD's aesthetic discourse expanded, allowing new concepts and terms, new rules and procedures to arrange themselves into a distinct discursive entity. The chapter depicts the first five volumes of the *Journeys* as responding to the rapidly changing political and social conditions that characterized the final years of the Soviet Union. KD's method differs significantly from that of Western or other Russian conceptualists, and this may be partially explained by the nature of the *Journeys*—which gradually acquired a more complex form and structure, a logic of its own, from the third phase on.

Compositionally, the short fourth chapter ("During': The Transition to Capitalism") is wedged between the third and the fifth to express the "terror" of transition from the Soviet to the Russian volumes of KD's *Journeys*. This chapter corresponds to the slash in the "before/after" metaphor, examining the repressed "during" of transition. Chronologically it corresponds to the turn of the 1990s when KD ceased to exist, as its former members traveled to diverse Western contemporary art venues to represent "Soviet nonconformism," "Moscow Romantic Conceptualism" or "contemporary Russian art"—categories that in this period had yet to be strictly differentiated. The space that separates KD from its before and after period may be compared to larger historical events, and its history is similar to that of the USSR. Like the Soviet Union—which divided into independent

republics only to find a new form of union within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)—or the European Union (EU), KD broke up and, after six years, teamed up again under the new name [KD].

The fourth chapter thus “fills” the blank spot that occurs in the history of KD by redirecting attention from the disbanded KD and its interrupted *Journeys* to the concept of transition per se, focusing on the paradigm of transitology. Its function and content, then, within the general structure of Part Two, reflects a search for ways to communicate, and account for, the inexpressible “during” of transition.

As a new paradigm of the political sciences, the discourse of transition may seem completely irrelevant to the problematics of contemporary art. Indeed, to this day, transitology has been regarded as a theoretical framework exclusively dedicated to the promotion of radical neoliberal reforms within political and economic realms. This chapter traces the origins of transitology in the modernization theories of previous decades, familiarizing the reader with its main premises and methods. In addition, it suggests that while in such fields as politics and economics transitology has been recognized from the beginning as an official discourse, in arts and culture it was and remains a latent, an implicit narrative. Among this book’s main objectives is to make this “cultural transitology” manifest by learning to recognize some of its concealed forces, as well as by pointing to some of those institutional mechanisms that have affected art and culture in particular.

One such mechanism of transition was the implementation by the international philanthropist George Soros of more than twenty Soros Centers for Contemporary Art (SCCA) throughout the entire post-Soviet space. Looking at the SCCA network’s history, the chapter succinctly addresses the SCCA as an example of an institution that carried on the transition in the field of culture and cultural policy, arguing that its impact on the region’s art may be compared to the influence of such key participants in the process of transition as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. While these major international organizations have been concerned with the conversion of planned economies into free markets and of monolithic, one-party rule into multiparty politics, the SCCA network dealt mainly with the emancipation of art and culture from the ideological, political, and economic control of the state. In doing so, the centers often followed the same logic imposed within the economic and political spheres, unleashing processes of deregulation, decentralization

and, of course, modernization within postsocialist art. The network left a pronounced impact not only on the conditions of postsocialist artistic production and distribution but also on artistic and aesthetic qualities and behaviors. Texts and reports published in KD's *Journeys* (which was itself published with the financial assistance of SCCA Moscow in the late 1990s) reveal the tracks and traces of these new institutional mechanisms in postsocialist art. It is here, in these new apparatuses of cultural support, that the discourse of transition becomes relevant for the history and aesthetics of KD, Moscow Conceptualism and, on a broader scale, for postsocialist contemporary art.

Chapter 5, "[KD]'s Journeys After 1989," recounts actions and events that seem more diffused, fragmented, and even hazy—resembling the broader political and economic transition in the experience of many. While the Soviet ("before") period concluded with the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the question of whether Russia has embraced pro-Western values and accomplished the transition ("during") to a democratic model ("after") is still widely debated.¹² KD's periodization of the nineties followed a similar course. The group reunited in 1995 but kept its name until the late nineties in a pair of square brackets [KD], as noted earlier. I maintain these brackets in the last chapter of this book to distinguish the KD of "before" from that of "after."

This chapter discusses a series of fragmentations that began to take place after 1989. In doing so, it focuses on new elements that appear in [KD]'s artistic discourse and shows how they affected the "after" part of the *Journeys*. Key new concepts entered the *Dictionary of Moscow Conceptualism* during the 1990s. Notably, some of these featured the prefix "schizo" ("schizo-analysis," "schizo-illustration," "schizo-China," or "schizo-analytical places in Moscow and the Moscow Region"), reflecting the artistic and aesthetic fragmentation that had begun to unfold within [KD]. One example concerns the new relationship structures among the group's members. In 1990 two members calculated the "percentages of authorship" and the exact involvement of each member in the production of actions, and issued a document elaborating their results. Such redistribution of collective artistic property among individuals mirrors

12 A large body of literature exists on this topic. See for instance Lilia Fedorovna Shevtsova, *Russia - Lost in Transition: the Yeltsin and Putin Legacies* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007).

larger social processes that took place at that time throughout the post-Soviet space. Indeed, the transition affected not only the interactions among KD's members but also impacted other established relationships involving the group; for example, its relationship to the public at large, to the notion and to the very experience of journeying outside the city, to the format and style of participants' reports, and to Kievogorskoe Field.

The fate of Kievogorskoe Field is an appropriate metaphor for the evolution of KD's aesthetic discourse during the more than three decades of its existence. The site, which once belonged to the Williams Institute of Fodder in Moscow and resembled a field on a typical collective farm (*kolkhoz*), was purchased in the 1990s by real estate developers and subdivided into lots that soon became home to the mansions of the *nouveaux riches*. The transformation of the very place that had constituted KD's aesthetic firing ground since the mid-1970s represented a significant change in the way the group produced art. Under new economic and social conditions, the gallery space (and not the field) became the most important site of KD's interaction with the public. This fundamental spatial shift in the production and exhibition of its art led to the emergence of another genre the group had not concerned itself with during Soviet times. After 1989, [KD]'s artists increasingly but not exclusively resort to the medium of installation, as conditioned by the appearance of many new local art galleries and more opportunities to exhibit abroad. Hence another example of the manifold paradoxes of art: while on the one hand these artists now had an unprecedented opportunity to make their work known to a wider public, on the other hand this had come at the price of permitting their actions and aesthetic discourse to become somewhat reified and alienated, transformed into objects that could be manipulated within the enclosed space and the ideology of the "white cube" and of the market. KD had constructed its aesthetic paradigm during Soviet times both by identifying itself with, and by questioning and undermining of the self-enclosed, hermetic system and language of the Politburo. With the restoration of capitalism in Russia, this model—formed to question and undermine an official hegemonic aesthetic position—lost some of its initial meaning and purpose, but continued to exist by virtue of its historical significance, as its aura was regularly conjured up in public displays and institutional promotions.

In accomplishing this project I have become indebted to many people. Above all, I am thankful to Andrei Monastyrsky, who has offered me unique material from his archive, and who has been remarkably open to questions and quick to answer them. I am grateful to Kristine Stiles, who encouraged me to embark on and persist in completing this project in its dissertation form (despite my doubts on so many occasions), and without whose encouragement I would neither have begun nor completed it. I also warmly thank Fredric Jameson, Patricia Leighton, Pamela Kachurin and Valerie Hillings, who agreed to serve on my dissertation committee at Duke University. Their critical responses, comments, and editorial suggestions have been very helpful. While working on this manuscript I was awarded a Katherine A. Stern Dissertation Year Fellowship, for which I am also very thankful. At various points in the course of my research and writing I found encouragement in one form or another from people within a wider artistic and cultural community. Here, I would like to thank Boris Groys, Kenneth Goldsmith, Yulia Tikhonova, Vadim Zakharov, Yuri Leiderman, Dan Spătaru (of Chisinau), Pedro Lasch, Stefan Rusu, Silvia Ursachi, Victor Ursu, Indre Klimaitė, Sven Spieker, Angela Harutyunyan, Kasper Kovitz, Rico Franses, Andrea Csanádi, and Emilia Kabakov. Finally, a special word of thanks goes to Catherine L. Hansen, without whom this book would never have become what it is.

PART I

A General Introduction to KD and Moscow Conceptualism

Chapter 1

A BIBLIOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

The art and aesthetics of KD, and to some extent that of what is known as Moscow Conceptualism, are closely related to two fields, one physical and the other conceptual. The first, which KD's members christened "Kievogorskoe Pole" due to its proximity to the village Kiev Gorky, is close enough to Moscow to make for a manageable day trip. The second field, which I call the "discursive field" of Moscow Conceptualism, is more abstract, and spans the central concepts and ideas that emerged within this tradition. Over more than three decades both of these fields have undergone reorganization in numerous respects, a process that I discuss throughout this book. Whereas the transformations that took place on the real Kievogorskoe Field—the field to which the Moscow conceptualists journeyed in order to participate in KD's actions—are discussed in Part II, this first part of the present volume considers the emergence and the topography of the discursive field of Moscow Conceptualism, to which KD has substantially contributed.

This book or, rather, one of its central conceptual approaches has been inspired by a method of historical analysis known in German as *Begriffsgeschichte*—"the history of concepts," "conceptual history," or "conceptual historiography." This method is distinct from more widespread historical methodologies in devoting great interest in the linguistic and semantic aspects of the discipline of history. Unlike social history, which rests on the tenet that all historical manifestations are based on or derived from social conditions, conceptual history pays close attention to language and to the key concepts used by historians.¹ Informed by nineteenth-century German philology and twentieth-century structuralism, *Begriffsgeschichte* places a strong emphasis on linguistic and semantic analysis, focusing

¹ On the difference between these two historical methods see Reinhart Koselleck, "Social History and Conceptual History," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 2, no. 3 (1989): 309.

in particular on those concepts used to construct historical narratives. Considering the concept to be the main prism of analysis, the practitioners of this method analyze and interpret key historical or political concepts in various historical contexts, pointing to the semantic transformations to which various concepts have been subjected over time. Those who practice *Begriffsgeschichte* emphasize that it must not be treated as an end in itself, but as a complement to social history.²

The discipline of art history—which in all the variety of its methods still treats, for the most part, artifacts and cultural events as manifestations of social conditions—may also benefit from a closer inspection of its vocabulary. A “conceptual” art history would aim at a closer historico-semantic examination, one that may reveal fossilized layers of historical connotations behind the signifying façade of its most frequently employed concepts. But a conceptual art history would be especially welcomed as a vehicle for examining a series of cultural phenomena that have evolved in the second half of the twentieth century under the art historical category “conceptual art” or “conceptualism.” Just as one significant task of traditional art history consists of addressing the materials and techniques employed by fine artists, so a conceptual art historical approach would pay equal attention to concepts and ideas, which for the conceptualists function as both artistic device and as medium.

This introduction aims chiefly to familiarize the reader with a constellation of concepts invented and theorized by Moscow conceptualists, to lay out their “discursive field,”³ as well as to show the dependence of certain concepts on their socioeconomic context by showing how some of these words could have emerged only before and others only after

2 On the *Begriffsgeschichte* method see Reinhart Koselleck and Todd Samuel Presner, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); and Koselleck, *Futures Past: on the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

3 I have chosen the notion of “discursive field” over that of “semantic field”—the latter being a term encountered more often in the *Begriffsgeschichte* literature—in order not to confuse it with KD’s “demonstrative semiotic field” and “exposition semiotic field,” to be introduced and discussed in Part II. Another term often encountered in conceptual historiography is “linguistic field.” I will not use this term, either, on the grounds that critics have insisted on a distinction between Western conceptualism, which is informed by various linguistic practices and theories of language, and the Moscow conceptualists, who repeatedly stress that their aesthetics is inspired by and derived from Russian nineteenth-century literature.

1989. This discursive field is made up of concepts, ideas, terms, names, and literary and historical sources—both published and unpublished, both real and virtual (that is, available online or available in the personal archives of the artists). For KD in particular, concepts constitute its artists' primary material, for the end result of each of its actions or events is a materialization—or, rather, dematerialization—into words, which are then theorized, raised to the level of abstract concepts, and used to construct a new series of actions: a process carried out again and again.

It is widely accepted that KD contributed to the organization or even the institutionalization of Moscow unofficial art and of conceptualism in particular,⁴ which suggests that there is a tight link between the activities and history of this group and the broader tradition of Moscow Conceptualism. KD does not only occupy a distinct place on the discursive field of Moscow Conceptualism but it may also be regarded as the main agent that took upon itself the task of cultivating, selecting, and guarding, for more than three decades now, the discursive field of this tradition. Just as KD became known for regularly assembling Moscow's unofficial artists and writers at a concrete location outside the city, inviting them to participate in their actions on Kievogorskoe Field, so must they also be credited with providing this circle with the abstract or conceptual version of that corporeal field. Monastyrsky's *Dictionary*,⁵ discussed in more detail below, is a clear manifestation of this mission, for on its pages one encounters those concepts and ideas that were invented and then tested by many of those conceptualists who visited Kievogorskoe Field over the course of several decades.

Both the real and the abstract fields of Moscow Conceptualism shared a similar fate. To jump somewhat ahead, Kievogorskoe Field, which before 1989 resembled a poorly cultivated piece of kolkhoz land, was to be subdivided by the year 2000 into neatly aligned house lots owned by Russian nouveaux riches (see Part II). The destiny of Kievogorskoe Field—the aesthetic firing ground of KD—mirrored that of the abstract, discursive field of Moscow Conceptualism, which before 1989 was, if not as fallow and unattended as the meadow near the village of Kiev Gorky, then not as thoroughly cultivated and partitioned as it would become in the post-

4 E. Bobrinskaia, "Kollektivnye deistvia kak institutsia," *Khudozhestvennyi zhurnal* 23 (1999). <http://www.guelman.ru/xz/362/xx23/xindx.htm> [accessed September 12, 2008]

5 Monastyrsky, *Slovar' terminov moskovskoi kontseptual'noi shkoly*.

Soviet period. To this intense cultivation would contribute, above all, a rich body of literature, published by the conceptualists themselves as well as by their interpreters. In other words, the discursive field of this tradition, like Moscow Conceptualism itself, did not emerge instantly as a well-demarcated domain, but separated gradually from a larger and relatively unstructured cultural field known as “unofficial,” “dissident,” “alternative,” or “nonconformist” Soviet art.

This introductory survey examines Moscow Conceptualism by discussing those sources that have contributed to the emergence of the tradition’s distinct discursive field; by introducing the different means of representing, naming, and grouping these conceptual artists and poets; and by presenting their key aesthetic concepts and principles. While examining the body of literature that emerged within and around KD and Moscow Conceptualism, at home and abroad, both before and after 1989, I also focus on several concepts and designations used in the related art historical and critical literature, including the terms “Collective Actions group” and “Moscow Conceptualism,” as well as the concept of “emptiness” and the attribute “romantic,” which can be regarded as this field’s main conceptual landmarks.

The year 1989, a watershed moment in the history of Eastern Europe, divides not only more than thirty years of KD’s activities into two periods [the Soviet period 1976–1989, and the Russian, or the “post-Soviet” period 1989–2008] but also serves as a crucial point of reference in the literature on KD and Moscow Conceptualism, separating a body of books, journal articles, exhibition catalogs, and online material into two parts. These parts may be imagined as two distinct subfields whose configuration has been shaped by the political and socioeconomic forces that prevailed during each historical period. In each subfield, I spotlight the different concerns and priorities that came into prominence before and after 1989, and also point to the distinct approaches, interpretations, and methodologies they favored. When considering Moscow Conceptualism, critics, art historians, and commentators have thus favored two sets of specific procedures and forms of analysis; used two discrete sets of concepts to organize and describe this cultural phenomenon; resorted to two distinct art historical and theoretical categories to elucidate it; emphasized different themes and events in the practice of these artists; and even wrote from conflicting ideological positions.

The literature on KD throughout its more than three decades may be described as fortuitous and fragmentary. It lacks the consecutiveness and continuity characteristic of writings on other artist collectives, writings that follow a group's development over the years, creating a unified body of scholarship or criticism. This has not been the case with KD. No monograph exists on KD to date, and the most reliable source of information remains the group's ten volumes of the *Journeys*, which have yet to be translated.⁶ This fragmentary state of written documentation is due partly to the focus that fell on the large number of short and rather broad critical interpretations that did appear—initially in a series of survey texts intended to introduce Soviet unofficial art to the Western public.

Before 1989 the group's works, as well as the work of other Moscow conceptualists, were addressed in an abbreviated manner, in isolated paragraphs or sections of larger publications devoted to Soviet unofficial art. This spare treatment was the result primarily of the relative scarcity of both critical or art historical insight and information, which led to an undifferentiated representation of these artists under one broad category: "unofficial art." After 1989, with the sudden increase of interest in this kind of art, critics and curators rushed to discover and introduce these artists to Western art institutions and collectors, but now under a broad new category: "Russian" or "post-Soviet contemporary art"—just as vague and undifferentiated as before. It was only toward the second half of the nineties that this ambiguous denotational field, once "unofficial" or "nonconformist" art and now "contemporary art," began to be demarcated and reorganized into more precise categories, among which "Moscow Conceptualism" began to occupy a more distinct place.

⁶ Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod*; 1-5 vols., and Monastyrsky, "Poezdki za gorod; 6-10 vols." [unpublished]. The material for the actions organized after 1989, which constitute five post-Soviet volumes of the *Journeys*, are available only online, at <http://conceptualism.letov.ru/KD-actions-91.html> [accessed May 4, 2009].

The literature on KD, and to some degree on Moscow Conceptualism, can also be considered fortuitous and fragmentary in that the criticism tends to qualitatively reflect its peculiar art and aesthetics, often described as “uncomfortable,” “vague,” “indeterminate,” “mysterious,” “aerial,” “elusive,” and “untranslatable.”⁷ Commentators tend to stress the hermetic character of the Moscow conceptualists, but KD takes this insularity to an extreme, risking alienating the outsider, as well as many of those who consider themselves well-versed in the history of twentieth-century Western or even Soviet or Russian art. One key reason for what can only be described as KD’s untranslatability is the abundance of bizarre terminology in their texts, a proclivity the group shares with other “text-oriented” representatives of Moscow Conceptualism. For example, reading a Moscow conceptualist text and coming across such categories as “hidden emptiness” (*spreatanaia pustota*), “corpse [oral] planting” (*trupnoe ozelenenie*), “rotten Pinocchio” (*gnilye Buratino*), or “rotten places of the golden nimbus” (*gnilye mesta zolotogo nimba*) can be quite frustrating. In order to understand such language, one must have some idea of that to which these words refer, which would however require a prior initiation into the circle of Moscow conceptualists. As one critic put it: “A person outside of Moscow Conceptualism is regarded as *a priori* incompetent (although he is given a chance to prove the opposite).”⁸

This attitude, shared by many within the circles of conceptualists, would explain not only the relative hermeticism that surrounds Moscow Conceptualism—and KD in particular—but also the relative scarcity of literature available today on these artists and their “sealed” aesthetics, as well as a certain incongruence between critical interpretations and Moscow Conceptualism itself, or even between those critics that have ventured to interpret their work. The case of KD is again paradigmatic here. Most of Moscow Conceptualism’s central concepts did not originate totally *ex nihilo* but emanated gradually from their activity, and in some cases from an ongoing dialogue with previous generations of Russian/Soviet artists and writers. The discursive field of this tradition should thus be regarded as a continuous tectonic activity, for its formation is the result of ongoing

⁷ See for instance Viktor Tupitsyn and Ilya Kabakov, *Glaznoe iabloko razdora: besedy s Il'ei Kabakovym* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006), 94–105.

⁸ Ekaterina Dyogot and Vadim Zakharov, *Moskovskii kontseptualizm*, World Art Muzei no. 15–16 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo WAM, 2005), 11.

telluric currents originating with earlier generations of cultural producers. This process is often manifest in the texts produced by the conceptualists or in the critical literature dedicated to them.

THE LITERATURE BEFORE 1989

Most of the available literature on KD (with the exception of the *Journeys*) is integrated within a larger body of texts dedicated to Moscow Conceptualism. In fact, a discussion of the discursive field of this tradition must begin by simultaneously addressing the terms “Collective Actions” (or KD) and “Moscow Conceptualism”—among the earliest conceptual landmarks in the tradition. These terms not only emerged around the same time, but were also so closely interconnected from then on that it is impossible to regard them independently. The first writers to report on certain unofficial artistic manifestations taking place in Moscow in the seventies also contributed to the establishment of these two terms, as the body of literature coalesced around a few scattered reviews published abroad as well as in local samizdat publications. By 1989, when most of artists in question had already left Moscow to journey and exhibit abroad, the number of texts quickly began to proliferate, forming during the nineties and into the next century an extensive list of publications.

The first texts that introduced KD to the public were also responsible for the emergence of the group’s name. A series of early short reviews written about the artist Nikita Alexeev, the philology student and photographer Georgii Kizevalter, and the poets Andrei Monastyrsky and Lev Rubinstein—a group of friends who would gather to discuss the latest cultural news or to travel to various locations within the USSR, and from 1976 to produce actions—were published in a few Western art publications shortly after their first collective activities.⁹ In 1977 the art magazine *Flash*

9 The first members of what would later become “Kollektivnye deistvia,” “KD” (or sometimes even “Koldei”) were Andrei Monastyrsky, Georgii Kizevalter, Nikita Alexeev, and Lev Rubinstein. Soon the poet Rubinstein decided not to participate, and his place was occupied by the philology student and later the collector of icons Nikolai Panitkov. See Nikita Alexeev, “Postoianstvo taiania snega,” *Russkii Zhurnal*, (April 14, 2005). <http://old.russ.ru/columns/moscow/20050414.html> [accessed April 20, 2009]. The most complete account on the origins of KD is in Givi Kordiashvili [Georgii Kizevalter], “Istoria ‘Kollektivnykh deistvii.’ Povest’ v dvukh chiasteakh s epilogom,” in Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod*; 1–5 vols., 198–219.

Art published a short bilingual (Italian-English) report about these artists and poets, placing a few brief descriptions and photographs within a larger body of material dedicated to Soviet unofficial art, which at that time was little known both at home and abroad.¹⁰ The editors placed the material, by an anonymous contributor, under the heading "N. Alexeev, G. Kizevalter, A. Monastyrsky & Co."¹¹ Already at this early stage the publication familiarized the reader with one of these artists' most enduring principles, one that remained at the center of this group's aesthetic method for more than thirty years: "the first condition of our planned 'action' is the indefinability of an idea, [for] the artists are in exactly the same [indefinable] situation as the spectators."¹² The word "indefinability" in this sentence may be regarded as an early version of the concept of "emptiness," which, as I discuss below, constitutes the main aesthetic principle of KD and Moscow Conceptualism.

Later the same year, 1977, the Venice Biennale published a special catalog on Soviet unofficial art.¹³ In this publication, which announced the unofficial participation of the USSR in the Biennale, some of the Moscow unofficial artists and artist groups were represented under a series of art historical categories such as abstraction, gesture, surreal figuration, organic abstractionism, postconstructivism, and so forth. In this way, this respectable art institution took upon itself the art historical task of distinguishing among various artistic manifestations within the Moscow unofficial art scene. Short texts were inserted in the section entitled *Mediazione concettuale, comportamento e azioni collettive* (conceptual mediations, behavior, and collective actions), along with photographs of works by Alexeev, Kizevalter, and Monastyrsky. The Biennale catalog presented the information in a snapshot format similar to that of the *Flash Art* article, though the former publication had a far greater impact on the subsequent evolution of these artists.

10 Ilaria Bignamini, "From the USSR." *Flash Art* 76/77 (1977), 9–19.

11 In the introduction to the *Flash Art* article Bignamini clarifies that he had technically supervised and organized the material that had been sent to him by an anonymous "I.M." *Ibid.*, 9.

12 *Ibid.*, 16.

13 Enrico Crispolti and Gabriela Moncada, *La nuova arte Sovietica: una prospettiva non ufficiale / La Biennale di Venezia* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1977), 183–201.

When, at that time, the young Russian critic Boris Groys wrote about the most important unofficial manifestations in Moscow in the newly established periodical *A-Ya*, he borrowed the last two words *azioni collettive* (collective actions) from the heading in the Venice Biennale catalog, using them as a subtitle for the section that discussed the works of these artists.¹⁴ In this way the phrase *azioni collettive* was adopted into Russian. The artists, who until then had signed their works individually, began gradually to acquire a collective consciousness and to think of themselves as a group.¹⁵ Toward the end of the first phase (1976–80) they began to sign their works with the phrase “Collective Actions,” switching later among themselves to the abbreviation “KD,” or using the acronym “Koldei.”¹⁶ It is also worth mentioning that at this time the artists did not yet use the category “action” to define the medium of their artistic activity. They spoke instead of “productions” or “stagings” (*postanovki*), less frequently of “performances,” “happenings,” and often used such abstract categories as “thing” (*vesch'*) or “work” (*rabota*).¹⁷ It was the Italian word *azioni*, employed for the first time on the pages of the Venice Biennale catalog, that first influenced the artists’ decision to subsume the numerous words used for describing their artistic endeavors under the new category *aktsia* (action).

14 Boris Groys, “Moscow Romantic Conceptualism,” *A-Ya*, no. 1 (1979): 3–11.

15 In an e-mail correspondence with the author, Monastyrsky suggested that Groys had borrowed the phrase “collective actions” from the Venice Biennale catalog. A. Monastyrsky, email message to the author (September 26, 2008). Groys, on the other hand, has insisted that Monastyrsky himself gave him this phrase when he was interviewing him for the Biennale catalog text. B. Groys, email message to the author (June 13, 2010). On the emergence of the name “Collective Actions” see also Kordiashvili, “Istoria ‘Kollektivnykh deistvii,’” 198–215.

16 “Koldei” stands for *kollektivnye deistvia*. See Alexeev, “Postoianstvo taiania snega.”

17 Kordiashvili, “Istoria ‘Kollektivnykh deistvii,’” 203.

Thus the emergence of the designation *kollektivnye deistvia* (collective actions) was due in part to the choice of words employed by the first critics to engage with the group. The authors of the Venice Biennale catalog may have chosen these specific two words in order to emphasize the sociopolitical context in which this art originated, for both “action” and “collective” were catchwords in the vocabulary of the political left. Perhaps their choice was partly a result of their leftist political sympathies.¹⁸ In any case, it was a choice that would lead to many misleading interpretations, mainly in the period after 1989. Critics, especially foreign ones, have often interpreted KD through the prism of its name. They often regarded KD’s art in terms of commentaries on Soviet life, maintaining, for instance, that “collective actions” is a play on “collective farm,”¹⁹ alluding to the group’s attachment to Kievogorskoe Field. In the next chapters I will discuss some of KD’s early actions organized on this field (which belonged to a Moscow-based research institute), where it will become clear that both the artists and the spectators tried hard to avoid any direct association with or reference to the Soviet political or ideological order. They were concerned with a completely different aesthetic and artistic problematic. More recently, some Russian critics have even suggested that there is a limited correspondence between KD’s lyrical and contemplative performances, or “group meditations” in the countryside, and the term “action.”²⁰

18 Vasilii Rakitin writes of the important role that foreign critics played in promoting Moscow unofficial art: “The Italian critics, sympathetic to the communist party, were very supportive of the Moscow artists, in whom they saw only representatives of a socialist art, which was contemporary in form. Future historians will also remark the role of the Czechoslovak critics in the propagation of the Moscow alternative art of the sixties. The journal *Výtvarné Umení* and *Výtvarné Práce* were publishing regularly on Moscow art. The events of 1968 put an end to these relations.” Vasilii Rakitin, “Russkaia volna, kazhetsea, poshla na spad,” *Tvorchestvo*, no. 11 (1991): 27.

19 See for instance Dan Fox and Jennifer Higgie, “Moscow,” *Frieze* April, no. 90 (2005): http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/city_report_moscow [accessed May 4, 2009].

20 Rakitin, “Russkaia volna, kazhetsia, poshla na spad,” 27.

Another word that here merits a brief examination—for it also often sets the tone in certain interpretations of Soviet unofficial art—is the word “group.” Like many other unofficial artists, KD added the word “group” to its name, placing *gruppa KD*, alongside *gruppa Dvizhenie* (Movement group), *gruppa Mukhomors* (Toadstool group), and so forth.²¹ In the USSR, after World War II, to be part of a group meant to withdraw from the all-encompassing category of “class”; to choose to belong to a group meant to distinguish oneself from the rest of society and become part of a minority. To use a dichotomy established in the Russian political lexicon, to be in minority meant to step to the side of the Mensheviks (the minority), subscribing to their social-democratic or even bourgeois liberal individualistic principles; it meant to drift further and further away from the universalizing category of class favored by the Bolsheviks (the majority). In art the tendency to unite in groups began after the death of Stalin (with Lianozovo in 1954 and Beliutin group in 1956) and particularly during Khrushchev’s Thaw, when the process of grouping began in both official artist circles (the progressive part of the Moscow Artists Union—“the left MOSKh”) and in unofficial ones.²²

21 This may also be regarded as one of the consequences of Groys’s text in *A-Ya*, which presented for the first time these artists as “Collective Actions Group,” while in the 1977 Italian publications these artists were listed separately. Only from the beginning of the second phase, in 1980 (the *A-Ya* text appeared in 1979), did they begin to sign their works collectively and regard themselves as a group.

22 Karl Eimermacher gives a detailed account of the significance of the term “group” within the context of Soviet unofficial art: “In those days [1960s], for the artists, it was a special ‘Western’ mannerism to announce themselves as a ‘group,’ and it was also in order to distinguish themselves from the general mass of other artists. In the fifties there were already ‘collectives’ (*brigady*) of sculptors, organized in the mid-1950s around Sidur, Lempont, and Silis, as well as the circle of artists, which gathered in 1954 in Lianozovo and 1956 around the figure of Beliutin. Only later were these called groups. At the beginning of the 1960s there began to emerge such groups as: ‘Group 8’ (*Gruppa 8*) and ‘Movement Group’ (*gruppa Dvizhenie*, 1962) which may be regarded as veritable groups. Such a late formation of artistic groups in the post-World War II period (in literature and music the situation was similar) may be explained by the fact that such groups were repressed in the twenties, while in the thirties their activities were completely paralyzed. The term ‘group’ carried the same meaning as the word ‘opposition.’” Karl Eimermacher and Natalia Margulis, *Ot edinstva k mnogoobraziiu: razyskaniia v oblasti “drugogo” iskusstva 1950-kh –1980-kh godov* (Moscow: Rossiiskii gos. gumanitarnyi universitet, 2004). n. 9, 65.

The appearance of the word “group” among the artists of the second half of the last century signals the beginning of a historical split in Soviet art. However, it must be also kept in mind that for many unofficial artists, and especially for Moscow conceptualists, this split was defined primarily in aesthetical terms. Thus, for instance, those foreign texts that tend to regard the art of KD in terms of a critique of the Soviet kolkhoz mentality are right, to a certain degree, in maintaining that these artists acted in opposition to the authorities, but it must also be added that many of these unofficial artists regarded their opposition as primarily aesthetic and not political. Karl Eimermacher groups the Soviet unofficial artists according to two distinct approaches to or functions of art: the “social function” and the “aesthetic function.”²³ KD, and most of the Moscow conceptualists that gathered around their circle, subscribed to the latter function, for they worked within what many Moscow unofficial artists called “private art” (*privatnoe iskusstvo*)—which, if defined politically, would be called “liberal” insofar as its main concerns evolved around individual experiences and the expression of subjectivity. Practitioners of “private” art, or followers of the “aesthetic function,” made a clear distinction between the realm of the political and that of the aesthetic, whereas on the opposing side of “social art”—within unofficial circles but especially among the official socialist realists—these two realms could not under any circumstances have been regarded independently. The wing of Moscow conceptualists to which KD belongs (sometimes also called “Kabakov’s circle”),²⁴ was often eager, in contrast, to make this distinction. Throughout the *Journeys*, KD artists and Monastyrsky in particular repeatedly warn against drawing simplistic conclusions as to supposedly direct links between their work and the sociopolitical context in which it is produced.

KD’s exclusively aesthetic concerns are evident from their earliest writings as well as from critical writings concerning them. In his *A-Ya* text “Moscow Romantic Conceptualism,” Groys wrote that the KD group

23 During the 1970s two parallel approaches with regard to the function of art emerged among unofficial artists: the “social function” and the “aesthetic function.” In the next decade the latter approach prevailed. See Eimermacher and Margulis, *Ot edinstva k mnogoobraziiu*, 23–4.

24 For the designation “Kabakov’s circle” see *Ibid.*, n. 37, p. 31. There is also information on this circle in Andrew Solomon, *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 82–84.

represented, in Moscow, performance art, warning (in the Russian version of his text but not in the English version on the facing page) that its name must not suggest social concerns, as its art exclusively addresses artistic and aesthetic problematics.²⁵ In other words, from the very beginning KD was driven forward by what Western art criticism called the “art for art’s sake” principle, by an understanding of art that favors the aesthetic over the political. Groys wrote, for example, that the group’s actions were an attempt to “decompose the visual effects produced by the events into its primordial elements—such as space, time, sound, or a number of figures”; that “their performances are all somewhat ephemeral”; and that the group relied primarily upon the viewer’s emotional predisposition, as well as upon chance.²⁶ As in the *Flash Art* material, Groys’s “Moscow Romantic Conceptualism” presents a group of artists who refuse to establish aesthetic precepts, who rely on indefinability and chance, and who engage the spectator in the act of interpretation—another lasting principle in KD’s aesthetic practice. The refusal to adopt such precepts and the promotion of the free exchange of interpretation lead, for Groys, to “unexpected forebodings and amazing discoveries—the sort of a world in which mankind was actually living not very long ago . . . a time when people came across inexplicable traces of some indefinite presence, signaling the existence of active and purposive forces that lead beyond the limits of common-sense explanations.”²⁷

Two years later Margarita Tupitsyn, who curated the exhibition “Russian New Wave” in New York,²⁸ included mention in that exhibition’s catalog of some performances organized by KD. She pointed to their major influences—above all, to John Cage and his concept of “sounding silence” (as demonstrated in his composition 4’33”), as well as to a certain Zenlike tranquility and contemplation apparent in the group’s performances. A more detailed review of KD’s practice signed by the same author appeared shortly thereafter in the California-based art quarterly *High*

25 Groys, “Moscow Romantic Conceptualism,” 10.

26 Ibid., 10–11.

27 Ibid., 11.

28 The exhibition “Russian New Wave” inaugurated the activities of the Contemporary Russian Art Center of America, an institution launched by Norton Dodge—the biggest American collector of Soviet nonconformist art. Margarita Tupitsyn and Norton T. Dodge, *Russian New Wave* (Mechanicsville: Cremona Foundation, 1981), [unpaginated].

Performance.²⁹ Here, KD is placed within a larger art historical context, discussed in relation to the Russian historical avant-garde, to the late-sixties kinetic experiments of the Moscow group "Movement" (*Dvizhenie*), and to the art of the international movement Fluxus. Tupitsyn also made the first attempt to introduce American readers to the group's emerging vocabulary, briefly explaining such notions as the "empty action" and the idea of "journey" which—as it will be evident in the next chapters—finds its aesthetic terminus in the concept of "emptiness." In 1985 a short reference to KD's art appeared in a book entitled *Soviet Émigré Artists*, which investigated the working and living conditions of artists in the USSR and the United States, providing some sociological insight into the motivations that led some Soviet artists to emigrate to the United States. Here, Marilyn Rueschemeyer cites previous works (Tupitsyn 1981) in explaining KD's conceptualistic refusal to produce tangible objects in light of the lack of an art market at the time and the subsequent impossibility of exhibiting and selling these objects. This was also, according to her, the reason for many Soviet artists' decision to emigrate to New York³⁰—an explanation that establishes somewhat *avant la lettre* a direct causal relation between the capitalist market of goods and conceptual art, a relation to which I will return.

Before 1989, professional criticism of KD appeared, and could have appeared, only in the West, where this group of conceptual artists was presented as part of a larger category of artists defined in various ways as "underground," "unofficial," "nonconformist," "dissident," "alternative," or "unengaged" (Crispoliti 1977, Bignamini 1977, Groys 1979, Tupitsyn 1981, 1981–82, Rueschemeyer 1985.) In the USSR, meanwhile, the only place where one could have found information about this and other unofficial groups was in a series of samizdat publications. Most of the available information on Moscow Conceptualism was collected in two projects launched and carried out in the early 1980s by the conceptualists themselves, one of which was KD's central project "Journeys Outside the City" (*Poezdki za gorod*), which the artists began to assemble in 1980 from documents, photographs, schemas, diagrams, maps, reports, and

29 Margarita Tupitsyn, "Some Russian Performances," *High Performance* 4, no. 4 (Winter 1981–82): 11–17.

30 Marilyn Rueschemeyer, Igor Golomshtok, and Janet Kennedy, *Soviet Emigre Artists: Life and Work in the USSR and the United States* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1985), 99–102.

commentaries about KD's actions. In 1998 this material was published in the five-volume publication of the same name.

The second samizdat project of the Moscow conceptualists was launched in 1981 under the title MANI. The acronym MANI stood for the Moscow Archive of New Art (*Moskovskii arkhiv novogo iskusstva*). Assembled by Andrei Monastyrsky and other conceptualists, this archive consisted of four folders, each containing a varying number of envelopes. The first of these, made by Monastyrsky with the assistance of Alexeev, comprised twenty envelopes that gathered together 125 photographs, 91 pages of written text, and two original artworks provided by Ivan Chuikov and Lev Rubinstein.³¹ Other members of KD contributed to the next three folders of the MANI archive, which grew by the fourth folder to comprise 648 photographs, 583 pages of text, and 80 original artworks collected from artists, poets, and critics associated with Moscow Conceptualism. Both the volumes of KD's *Journeys* and the MANI folders existed in four copies. Monastyrsky, Kabakov, and Panitkov each had one copy, and the fourth circulated among the conceptualists, remaining most often in the hands of Vadim Zakharov and Anatoly Zhigalov.³² Often those authors who discuss the MANI archive do not make a distinction between the archive, which consisted only of four folders compiled until the mid-eighties, and the MANI collection (*sbornik*) produced by Monastyrsky, with the assistance of Josef Backstein, since 1986.³³ In 1988 Monastyrsky sold his copy of the MANI archive to Norton Dodge, the American collector of Soviet nonconformist art, and it is now part of the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Soviet Nonconformist Art at Rutgers University.³⁴ The Rutgers collection also contains one copy of the initial handwritten versions of the *Journeys*.

31 The detailed description of the four folders of the MANI archive is contained in a personal file e-mailed by A. Monastyrsky to the author, May 6, 2009.

32 A. Monastyrsky e-mail message to the author, May 6, 2009.

33 The MANI collection (*sbornik*) consists of six bound books in A4 format. They contain text, photographs, drawing, and diagrams. Each of these books is dedicated to a particular theme. Four copies of the books were distributed among Monastyrsky, Sabine Hänsen, Ilya Kabakov, and Yuri Leiderman. The copy of Panitkov is part of the "Russian Avant-Garde" fund in Moscow. A. Monastyrsky e-mail message to the author, May 7, 2009.

34 For Norton Dodge's collection of Soviet nonconformism see John McPhee, *The Ransom of Russian Art*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994).

From all the available sources produced before 1989, Givi Kordiashvili's 1983 account of KD, entitled "The History of Collective Actions," is the most detailed and comprehensive examination of the earliest two phases (1976–80 and 1980–83).³⁵ Subtitled "story in two parts and an epilogue," it offers significant details regarding the emergence of the group—from the character of its early meetings to the main subjects of discussion, the participants' common interests and friends, their favored movies and books, their trips to various Russian towns, and even intimate details of the original members' private lives. This short history of early KD, written from the perspective of someone who knew this circle of Moscow conceptualists very well, was published only in 1998, in the first five volume of the *Journeys*. Most of the pre-1989 literature about KD and the Moscow conceptualists had either been published abroad or circulated in a few samizdat copies among unofficial artists and their friends. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, this material lost its initial archival function of collecting and centralizing the information on Moscow Conceptualism, becoming instead a set of relics or memories for those who had been engaged in the aesthetic and artistic opposition to the Soviet regime.

The event that best symbolizes the beginning of the transition from the Soviet "before" to the post-Soviet and then Russian "after" period was an auction organized by Sotheby's in Moscow. This first public sale of Soviet unofficial art was accompanied by the *Catalog of Russian Avant-Garde and Soviet Contemporary Art Sold by Auction in Moscow, on Thursday, July 7th 1988*.³⁶ The Sotheby's auction concerned KD only indirectly, as the latter did not sell its objects at the auction but in fact organized an action the following day, which was attended by some of the auction's guests. The Sotheby's event had a tremendous impact on the local unofficial art scene. Russian art critics write today that "at this time Sotheby's solemnly entered into the history of Russian art,"³⁷ and indeed it was the title of this catalog

35 Kordiashvili "Istoria Kollektivnykh deistvii."

36 Sotheby's, *Catalog of Russian Avant-Garde and Soviet contemporary art ... Moscow, Thursday 7 July 1988* (Sotheby's, 1988).

37 See for instance Faina Balachovskaia, "Dvadtsat' let spustea," <http://www.gif.ru/themes/kunstbazar/sothebys-ruscont/20let/> [accessed November 23, 2008]. On the effect of the Sotheby's auction on the local art scene, see the documentary by Barbara Herbich, *USSR ART* (Los Angeles: Direct Cinema Ltd., 1990), and Solomon, *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost*.

that announced to the Soviet public the arrival of a new cultural category: “contemporary art.” Here one witnesses a truly lexicographical event, for Sotheby’s transformed the previous art historical category “Soviet unofficial art” or “Soviet nonconformism” into “Soviet contemporary art.” The works were brought to the auction with the category “Soviet unofficial” and were bought by Western collectors with the new tag “Soviet contemporary.” With the collapse of the USSR three years afterward, the word “Soviet” disappeared, and those unofficial artists who had participated in the auction, and who had stepped victoriously into the new epoch of Russian capitalism, were simply called “contemporary artists.”

THE LITERATURE AFTER 1989

For many including KD, the Sotheby’s auction was a historical milestone, after which the changes were rapid and permanent. Toward the end of 1989, KD disintegrated, and its artists began to exhibit individually, touring in various international venues and exhibitions of contemporary art. In the first half of the nineties a certain confusion of terms still persisted, and the literature mentioning the former members of KD varied between such terms as “unofficial,” “nonconformist,” “Moscow conceptualists,” “contemporary artists,” or one of many words that begin with the prefix post—including post-Soviet, postsocialist, posthistorical, posttotalitarian, postideological, and postmodernist.³⁸ Gradually this large number of epithets began to thin out as they came to designate more concrete art historical or cultural phenomena. I shall return to this process of naming and renaming, as well as to the historical context in which some of these

38 Some examples of “post” literature that mentions KD or Moscow Conceptualism: Alexey Yurasovsky and Sophie Ovenden, *Post-Soviet Art and Architecture* (London, New York: Academy Editions, 1994); Viktor Tupitsyn, *Kommunal’nyi (post)modernizm: russkoe iskusstvo vtoroi poloviny XX veka* (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1998); Larissa Rudova, “Paradigms of Postmodernism: Conceptualism and Sots-Art in Contemporary Russian Literature,” *Pacific Coast Philology* 35, no. 1 (2000); Mikhail Epstein, Aleksandr Genis, and Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover, *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999); Aleš Erjavec and Boris Groys, *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

terms emerged or were replaced by others, as I discuss the literature as well as the discursive field of Moscow Conceptualism.

With few exceptions, most of the texts produced after 1989 continued to be written in the format of a general survey. It must however be added that the survey format—which has been the dominant form of presentation with regard to these artists since the mid-1970s, when several Italian publications introduced these artists to the Western public—is also the result of a relative scarcity of scholarship on these artists. The survey mode is conditioned by the very format of the available literature, which consists mainly of exhibition catalogs organized by various contemporary art centers and museums, short articles and reviews published in Russia and foreign periodicals, and a series of published dialogues between critics and artists.³⁹ This is literature that, on the whole, tends to present rather than critically discuss or interpret the art and aesthetics of Moscow Conceptualism.

Before comparing several methodological tendencies and themes that prevailed before and after 1989 in the literature on KD, Andrew Solomon's *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost* (1991) merits mention. Written in a formal yet nonacademic style, the book begins with the description of the Sotheby's 1988 auction in Moscow and its impact on the local unofficial art scene. In his work's subsequent chapters, Solomon narrates his own experience meeting the Moscow unofficial artists during his trips to the USSR in the late eighties.⁴⁰ He tells the individual stories of many of these artists (including some early KD members), describes how they came together in the early seventies, identifies some of their first works, discusses their meetings, and considers the group's dominant figures. The *Irony Tower* remains the most complete biographical account of many of these artists in any language to date.

39 There is a list of published conversations between Kabakov and Groys, or Kabakov and V. Tupitsyn. See Ilya Kabakov, *Noma ili Moskovskii kontseptual'nyi krug: installiatsiia* (Cantz: Hamburger Kunsthalle, 1993); Viktor Tupitsyn, "Drugoe" iskusstva: besedy s khudozhnikami, kritikami, filosofami, 1980–1995 (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1997); Ilya Kabakov, Boris Groys, and Elena Petrovskaia, *Dialogi: 1990–1994* (Moscow: Ad-Marginem, 1999); Tupitsyn and Kabakov, *Glaznoe iabloko razdora: besedy s Il'ei Kabakovym*.

40 Solomon, *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost*.

From a critical perspective the remaining literature on KD can be divided along two methodological lines: (a) emphasis on the visual arts, and (b) emphasis on the literary and/or the poetic. Although these two approaches are not strictly parallel but tend often to intersect, in every text about KD one senses the prevalence of either the visual or the literary. Those commentators who tend to regard the group's work within the visual art tradition of performances, actions, or happenings emphasize the ephemeral character of the lived artistic moment, bringing into focus the documentation or the objects that accompanied or were produced at the end of the action.⁴¹ Critics inclined toward this approach often draw parallels with other traditions in the Western contemporary art, comparing or referring the aesthetics of the group to Fluxus, Minimalism, Pop Art, Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Kosuth, Alan Kaprow, or John Cage. The trend toward regarding the group within a visual arts context prevailed especially before 1989 (Crispolti 1977; Bignamini 1977; M. Tupitsyn 1981–82; Tavel, 1988), although this tendency continued with some authors into the nineties (Bobrinskaia 1994, Klocker 1998, Dyogot 2000). The predominance of this approach before 1989 was due primarily to the fact that most of the documents and texts written or assembled by KD and other Moscow conceptualists had not yet been published—with only limited circulation among the conceptualists—and their interpreters' attention was primarily attracted to various objects that constituted only "additional material" or "traces" of their main aesthetic goals: collective action and journeying.

After 1989, and especially toward the late nineties, when most of the writings of the conceptualists had been published in Russia and abroad, gradually a different orientation and critical method began to take shape—namely, the literary approach, the first texts of which appeared in the first half of the nineties (Bobrinskaia 1994). But this should not be confused with the "linguistic" approach that has been prevalent in the West, especially as reflected in the so-called Anglo-American conceptualism of Art & Language and Joseph Kosuth. The literary tendency became more obvious toward the end of this decade and the beginning of the twenty-

41 See for instance Hans Christoph von Tavel, Markus Landert, and Kunstmuseum Bern, *Zhivu-vizhu = Ich lebe-ich sehe* (Bern: Kunstmuseum Bern, 1988); Hubert Klocker, "Gesture and the Object, Liberation as Aktion: A European Component of Performative Art," in *Out of Actions: between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979*, ed. Paul Schimmel (Los Angeles, New York: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Thames and Hudson, 1998).

first century, when many texts on Moscow Conceptualism (including the *Journeys* and the *Dictionary*) were made public. Those who rely on this method perform a close reading of the documentation and literature produced by KD, paying tribute to the emphasis that the group accorded to text. Moscow Conceptualism has often been described as emerging at the junction of art and literature, and in the case of KD this was also facilitated by the fact that some of its members and participants were poets, writers, or philologists.⁴²

Before the publication of the first five volumes of the *Journeys*, in 1998, and of the *Dictionary* in 1999, only the initiates, or the relatively select group of people invited to attend KD's actions—mostly artists grouped under the special category of "spectator-participants"—could have been familiar with the texts and terms employed by the Moscow conceptualists to describe their aesthetic program. But even after the publication of the *Dictionary*, which was intended to translate the Moscow conceptualists' terminology (for the most part fabricated by KD and its circle), critics did not rush to write elaborate interpretations of KD's aesthetics based on these concepts, partly because the *Dictionary* itself needed further translation.

Those critics who favor the literary or poetic interpretation tend (as I have already mentioned) to integrate the visual and the literary: the action and the postaction. Ekaterina Bobrinskaia, in her foreword to the *Journeys*, stresses that from the early days KD's performances were grounded not in visual art but above all in poetry and music.⁴³ She describes the work of KD in terms of the dissolution of literature and of the poetic text into action, into everyday life, suggesting that text comes first and action, second. This is different from other works of art, where an action or artistic object predisposes or even conditions the emergence of the textual interpretation. For KD the action is the interpretation of the text.

⁴² Today some literary critics write of Monastyrsky that he "soon abandoned his poetic experiments and became leader of Collective Actions." Mikhail Aizenberg and Michael Makin, *A Few Others; an alternative chronicle: first version*, vol. 32 no. 2, Russian Studies in Literature (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1996), 44. Among other poets, writers, and philologists who have been involved in the work of KD as members or participants are L. Rubenshtein, D. Prigov, G. Kizevalter, V. Sorokin, N. Panitkov and the German cultural historian Sabine Hänsen, who joined the group in 1988. Of the initial four members of KD only N. Alexeev had received training in the visual arts.

⁴³ E. Bobrinskaia, "O knigakh 'Poezdki za gorod'," in A. Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1-5 vols.*

Bobrinskaia calls KD's work "'collective' actionist poetry" (*'kollektivnaia' aktsionnaia poezia*), insisting that the first five volumes of the *Journeys* are a documentation of the process of transition of the poetic into action, and that the documentation and the interpretation that follows the action should be regarded in terms of a trace of something that took place and was experienced in the past, and which is now required in order to complete the work of art.⁴⁴ In other words, an action by KD is not considered complete without the act of interpretation. Another text in which language and speech are at the center of critical analysis is Sylvia Sasse's *Texte in Aktion* (2003). Of all the literature written about KD (with the exception of the *Journeys* itself), Sasse's is the most complete and theoretical work to date. It discusses the notion of speech and the importance of the speech-act in the context of Moscow Conceptualism. In a long chapter, Sasse examines in detail some of KD's actions from the first five phases (the Soviet period), placing them in a larger cultural, historical, and theoretical context, as well as attempting to introduce the reader to the terms the artists used most frequently.⁴⁵

THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE DISCURSIVE FIELD OF MOSCOW CONCEPTUALISM

During the 1990s most of the information available on KD remained relatively fragmented and dispersed into general survey texts. This fragmentation of the literature reflects the general confusion that existed in late Soviet and new Russian contemporary art history, which during this decade underwent a radical reorganization. For instance, after 1989, and especially in the first half of the 1990s, when numerous Western exhibitions had begun to introduce Russian artists abroad, KD was sometimes, as previously noted, cataloged as "nonconformist," following a tradition established in the Soviet period, and sometimes as "contemporary art." Some exhibition catalogs of this period show members of KD, or of the Inspection Medical Hermeneutics group—which also goes by the abbreviation MG from the Russian term *Medgerminevtika*—of the third

⁴⁴ Ibid., 13–14.

⁴⁵ Sylvia Sasse, *Texte in Aktion: Sprech- und Sprachakte im Moskauer Konzeptualismus* (Munich: W. Fink, 2003).

and last generation of Moscow conceptualists, participating shoulder to shoulder with the notorious Russian actionists of the nineties, Alexander Brener and Oleg Kulik.⁴⁶ Indeed, many critics (mainly non-Russian) made no clear distinction between the highly provocative and rather violent actions of the Russian actionists and the more meditative collective actions of KD.⁴⁷ Art historians and curators “mixed up very different, often incompatible artistic positions,”⁴⁸ often due to the abundance and variety of spontaneous initiatives that aimed at introducing “Soviet vanguard art” to the Western art world. It was only toward the second half of the 1990s and into the next century that one observes a clearer tendency to present Moscow Conceptualism as an autonomous, self-sufficient phenomenon developed by three generations of Moscow artists.⁴⁹ This was the result of numerous efforts made by artists and critics associated with this tradition, who over the years organized exhibitions and dedicated considerable efforts to publishing the texts produced by the circle of Moscow Conceptualism,

46 For an example of a mid-nineties exhibition of nonconformism where KD and many other groups and artists are represented, see Jean Hubert Martin and Andrei Erofeev, *Kunst im Verborgenen: Nonkonformisten in Russland 1957–1995* (Munich; New York: Prestel, 1995). For a contemporary art show see Morten Lerhard, *No Man's Land: Art from the near Abroad = Kunst fra det nære udland*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: Nikolaj, Copenhagen Contemporary Art Center, 1995).

47 See for instance Klocker “Gesture and the Object, Liberation as Aktion,” 166–67.

48 See Boris Groys, Max Hollein, and Manuel Fontán del Junco, *Die totale Aufklärung: Moskauer Konzeptkunst 1960–1990 / Total Enlightenment: Conceptual Art in Moscow 1960–1990* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2008), 29.

49 The three generations of Moscow conceptualists are usually presented in the following way: first generation: Ilya Kabakov (1933), Viktor Pivovarov (1937), Ivan Chuikov (1935), Vitaly Komar (1943), and Alexander Melamid (1945) (the last two often regarded also as Sots artists); second generation: the groups “KD,” “Nest,” “Mukhomor,” “SZ,” the poets Lev Rubinstein (1947), Dmitry Prigov (1940), and the artists Vadim Zakharov (1959) and Yuri Albert (1959); and the group Inspection Medical Hermeneutics (Medgerminevtika), whose members were born in the 1960s, considered the third and the last generation of Moscow Conceptualism.

stressing the distinctiveness and historical relevance of this tradition.⁵⁰ In the next century these efforts became more obvious as some publications initiated a process of selection, drawing a clearer and “tighter” circle around those artists and poets who were considered part of this tradition.⁵¹ These efforts went hand in hand with other processes of reorganization of the art historical field. By the mid-1990s critics began to apply more precise art historical terms and categories to the Soviet-Russian art of the second half of the century. This may be regarded as an expansion of the domestic art historical field and as an increasing sophistication of the art critical discourse. Such broad terms as “underground” or “unofficial,” terms used during the late Soviet period to refer to artists working outside of mainstream culture, began to fragment under the pressure of new categories. If before 1989 it was predominantly foreign critics who assumed the task of a more thorough differentiation among this category of artists, as seen above in the example of the Venice Biennale catalog, then gradually after 1989 there was a growing volume of domestic literature that undertook this task. A 1995 catalog organized post-1945 Soviet-Russian art according to such themes as “metaphysical painting” (1950s), “abstraction” (1950–60s), “realism of the everyday” (1960s), “language and representation” (1960–70s), “Moscow Conceptualism” (mid-1970s), “Sots Art” (mid-1970s), “Apt-art” (mid-1980s), “Schizoanaliz” (mid-1980s), “Art history appropriation” (1980s), “Echoes of Dada and the re-actualization

50 The following list of publications has contributed substantially to the formation of a consistent body of published literature on Moscow Conceptualism. In chronological order: Groys, “Moscow Romantic Conceptualism”; David A. Ross, ed., *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism*, 1st MIT Press ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990); Achille Bonito Oliva and L. Bazhanov, *A Mosca—a Mosca* (Verona: Olograf, 1992); Ilya Kabakov, *Das Leben der Fliegen / The Life of Flies / Zhizn' mukh*, exh. cat (Cologne: Kölnishcher Kunstverein, 1992); Kabakov, *Noma ili Moskovskii kontseptual'nyi krug: instal-liatsiia*; E. Bobrinskaia, *Kontseptualizm* (Moscow: Galart, 1994); Kathrin Becker, Dorothee Bienenert, and Milena Slavická, *Flug, Entfernung, Verschwinden: Konzeptuelle Moskauer Kunst: Galerie hlavního města Prahy, Prag, Haus am Waldsee, Berlin, Stadtgalerie im Sophienhof, Kiel* (Ostfildern: Cantz, 1995); Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1-5 vols*; Monastyrsky, *Slovar' terminov moskovskoi kontseptual'noi shkoly*; Kabakov et al., *Dialogi: 1990-1994*; Joseph Backstein and Bart de Baere, *Angels of History: Moscow Conceptualism and its Influence* (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2005); Tupitsyn and Kabakov, *Glaznoe iabloko razdora*; Groys et al., *Die totale Aufklärung: Moskauer Konzeptkunst 1960–1990*.

51 A good example is the so-called “golden book of Moscow Conceptualism” published in 2005. Dyogot and Zakharov, *Moskovskii kontseptualizm*.

of modernist provocations" (1980s), "Mass media and the re-actualization of engaged art" (late 1980s and 1990s).⁵² In the meantime, the blanket term "nonconformism" was increasingly applied to, and limited to, earlier generations of painters and those whom the conceptualists often referred to as the "underground," the "communal modernists," or the "dissident modernists" of the fifties and sixties.⁵³ Moreover, efforts have been made to reconsolidate former adversaries—the nonconformists of the fifties and sixties with the socialist realists of the same period—by exhibiting them together as two modernist offshoots.⁵⁴

With this reorganization of art historical categories came a re-examination of the relation of the Moscow artists from the second half of the last century to their historical predecessors—the Russian avant-garde. Critics and artists associated with Moscow Conceptualism have also written extensively about this complex relationship. In the catalog to the first large-scale exhibition of Moscow conceptual art in the United States, organized by the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art and the Tacoma Art Museum, the contributors analyzed the relationship of the aesthetic program of Moscow Conceptualism to modernism, and asked whether these artists should be defined as modern or as postmodern.⁵⁵ Most of them tended to agree that the overall program of the Moscow conceptualists was antimodernist in that it confronted the ideology of USSR, itself the materialization of utopian modernist beliefs (Sussman, 63); the artists used postmodern devices to

52 See Martin, and Erofeev, *Kunst im Verborgenen*, 54–55.

53 Although the first generation of conceptualists (e.g., Kabakov, Chuikov, Bulatov) are also cataloged as nonconformists, the category is now applied mostly to those painters who emerged in the late fifties and in the sixties and who are known under the names of several different groups including, for example, *Lianozovskaia* and *Sretenskii Boulevard*. For "underground modernism" see Ekaterina Dyogot, *Russkoe iskusstvo XX veka* (Moscow: Trilistnik, 2000), 159–64. The term "dissident modernism" belongs to M. Tupitsyn. See Monastyrsky, *Slovar' terminov moskovskoi kontseptual'noi shkoly*, 38. The term "communal modernism" was introduced by V. Tupitsyn, *ibid.*, 53.

54 See for instance the catalog of the exhibition *Soviet Dis-Union* (2006) where Raymond Johnson's collection of Socialist Realism is shown next to Norton Dodge's collection of nonconformism. Maria Bulanova and Alla Rosenfeld, *Soviet Dis-Union: Socialist Realist & Nonconformist Art* (Minneapolis: Museum of Russian Art, 2006). See also Barbara M. Thiemann and Peter und Irene Ludwig Stiftung, *(Non)conform: Russian and Soviet art, 1958–1995: the Ludwig Collection* (Aachen, Munich, New York: Peter und Irene Ludwig Stiftung, Prestel, 2007).

55 Ross, ed., *Between Spring and Summer*, 62.

confront the modernist ideal of the artist-ideologue (Backstein, 77); or, as in the case of KD, the artists rejected the modernist belief in the work of art as a discrete event or object (Ross, 14).

The relationship of the conceptualists, critical or otherwise, to high modernism was not a new theme. Most of the unofficial Soviet artists from the fifties on were faced with the question of how to relate to the revolutionary zeal of the avant-garde artists of the twenties. In his book *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin* (1988), which assimilated some of the concerns voiced by many unofficial artists with regard to their historical predecessors,⁵⁶ Groys argues that the doctrine and the language of Socialist Realism, which was the major working material for many conceptualists, were the logical outcome of the historical Russian avant-garde's work and their radical program of transforming reality. To many artists of the post-1945 generations, Stalin was the perfect embodiment of the avant-garde artist of the twenties—the artist-ideologue who shouldered the demiurgic task of transforming and reshaping inert human material. In *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin* and in other books, Groys suggests that the main political and aesthetic task of the Moscow conceptualists was to disrupt the Soviet project, to deconstruct the language and ideology to which the Russian avant-garde artists had indirectly contributed.⁵⁷ Other critics have referred to the program of the Moscow conceptualists in terms of a counterrevolution and an antiutopian trend directed against their historical predecessors.⁵⁸

56 Boris Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin: die gespaltene Kultur in der Sowjetunion* (Munich: C. Hanser, 1988). This book appeared in English translation in 1992, and in Russian in 1993: Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) and Boris Groys, *Utopia i obmen* (Moscow: Znack, 1993).

57 One wing of the historical Russian avant-garde to which the conceptualists and other Soviet unofficials showed full loyalty and claimed direct linkage was the OBERIU group. But the latter did not share a passion for revolutionary art with the Cubo-futurists, the Constructivists, or the Suprematists, and therefore this group has been less known abroad. For an overview of the OBERIU movement see Graham Roberts, *The Last Soviet Avant-garde: OBERIU—Fact, Fiction, Metafiction*, Cambridge studies in Russian literature (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); A. Kobrinskii, *Poetika "OBERIU" v kontekste russkogo literaturnogo avangarda*, Izd. vtoroe, ispr. i dop. ed., 2 vols. (Moscow: Izd-vo Moskovskogo kulturologicheskogo lytseia, 2000).

58 See Backstein and Baere, *Angels of History*. 16–20.

But the decision to place Moscow Conceptualism within the context of the historical Russian avant-garde has also had a more pragmatic agenda, the main concern of which was to claim that the former had taken the mantle from the latter, and that the Moscow conceptualists—and not the dissident modernists of the sixties [*shestidesyatniki*], the actionists of the nineties, or the Leningrad artists who never denied their “‘loyalty’ to the legacy of the historic Russian and Soviet avant-gardes”—were the true inheritors of the historical avant-garde.⁵⁹ Often using the expression “the second Russian avant-garde,” many have claimed that of all recent cultural phenomena it was only Moscow Conceptualism which could be compared in intensity and significance to the historical avant-garde; that the conceptualists were the ones who managed, in three generations, to articulate the most elaborate aesthetic and political responses to their eminent predecessors; that they conducted a successful counterrevolution against the revolutionary principles and institutions set by the historical avant-garde.⁶⁰ The perpetuation of the Russian cultural tradition again followed the formula deduced in the twenties by Viktor Shklovsky, a formula according to which the succession of heritage and the renewal of literary or artistic form does not take place in a linear way, but as in the “knight’s move” (*khod konya*)⁶¹—the inheritance passed not from the father (the Russian avant-garde) to the son but from the uncle (OBERIU, for example, or the modernists of the 1960s) to his nephew.

This line of cultural inheritance, neither direct nor linear but digressive and convoluted, has been suggested in many texts since the late nineties. While some critics have made direct claims to this effect (Backstein 2005, p.16) others have only strongly implied the relationship between the avant-garde and the conceptualists by providing constant references to and comparisons between the two. For instance, some of Kabakov’s early works (the so-called Album series), as well as the white, snow-covered fields on the surface of which KD organized its actions,

59 *Shestidesyatniki* (generation of the sixties), from *shestdesyat’* (sixty). Soviet humanist intellectuals who voiced their protest in art and culture from the second half of the sixties. For the Leningrad unofficial artists see Ross, *Between Spring and Summer*, 104.

60 For the “second Russian avant-garde” see Backstein and Baere, *Angels of History*, 18.

61 Viktor Borisovich Shklovskii and Richard Sheldon, *Knight’s Move*, 1st ed. (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 2005). On the relation of Moscow Conceptualism to OBERIU see above, note 57.

have often been compared to Kasimir Malevich's monochromes.⁶² Many conceptualists have done variations on Malevich's "Black Square" (1913), and this painting has been a frequent subject of discussion among the Moscow Conceptualists.⁶³ Bobrinskaia compares KD's role in structuring and institutionalizing the Moscow conceptual art scene to that played by the historical avant-garde in creating new institutions. From the beginning of their appearance in the mid-1970s, KD acted as a substitute for the missing art infrastructure. By organizing journeys and encouraging their spectators to participate in acts of interpretation, KD provided the necessary tools for institutionalizing a part of the Moscow unofficial art scene and for structuring the artistic consciousness of its small but elite public.⁶⁴ The successful institutionalization that the group accomplished in the Soviet period allowed it to keep functioning in the nineties, and, in this regard, the practices of KD and of other Moscow conceptualists resemble those of the historical avant-garde. Although they stood on very different, even incompatible political and aesthetic platforms, both launched new institutions (publications, archives, museums, and institutions of contemporary art) and succeeded in establishing them in society.

62 For references to Malevich's monochromes see Klocker, "Gesture and the Object, Liberation as Aktion" or Kabakov et al., *Dialogi: 1990-1994*, 99–100. See also Erjavec and Groys, *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition*, 82 and Dyogot, *Russkoe iskusstvo XX veka*, 189.

63 See for instance the first issues of the journal *A-Ya*.

64 On the practice of establishing institutions see Bobrinskaia, "Kollektivnye deistvia kak institutsia" and Groys et al., *Die totale Aufklärung*, 35.



FIGURE 1: VADIM ZAKHAROV, *HISTORY OF RUSSIAN ART FROM THE RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE TO MOSCOW CONCEPTUALISM*, INSTALLATION, 2004

In recent years, various exhibitions and publications have presented Moscow Conceptualism as the next significant Russian cultural phenomenon and as a conclusive episode in this country's twentieth-century art. The Moscow conceptualists portray themselves as the direct successors of the historical Russian avant-garde, as the artistic movement that wrote the last page of twentieth-century Russian/Soviet art. Their direct predecessors, the nonconformists, or the dissident modernists of the fifties and sixties together with their socialist realist opponents, appear within this vision of Soviet-Russian cultural history as a bridge that connects the conceptualists to the historical avant-garde. According to this account the historical avant-garde wrote the introduction while the Moscow conceptualists were responsible for the conclusion (FIGURE 1). The efforts to make this tradition recognizable have culminated in a series of "monumental" exhibitions and catalogs. In 2005, the "golden book" of Moscow Conceptualism drew a hagiographical halo around those who had

been at the center of this tradition.⁶⁵ A series of other recent publications describe KD and the major Moscow conceptualists as “angels of history” who “made a truly historicizing revolution [or counterrevolution] within the space of the Soviet metaphysics of their time: creating with their actions a dimension of History inside the space of Bolshevism’s post-historicism...” (Backstein 2005, p. 16). Others state, for example, that, “the Moscow Conceptualists were practicing a kind of enlightenment—specifically a total enlightenment [. . .] enlightening the Soviet culture about its own ideological mechanisms” (Groys 2008, p. 33).

The members of KD have substantially contributed to this reorganization of the field of the late Soviet and contemporary Russian art history, wherein their efforts have been directed at demarcating an autonomous terrain for Moscow Conceptualism. The *Dictionary of Moscow Conceptualism*, edited by Monastyrsky, has contributed most substantially to these efforts by providing a map of the discursive field of this tradition, listing and summarizing its key concepts and ideas (see the Appendix). The *mot à mot* translation of this publication’s title is “Dictionary of Terms of the Moscow Conceptual School,” where the term “school” refers to the three generations of conceptualists in which younger artists were mentored by older ones, as well as to the fact that many of these artists and poets have regarded their artistic and aesthetic practices as an ongoing epistemological project; that is, as an investigation of art’s conditions of possibility. In this regard the work of the Moscow conceptualists, and of KD in particular, follows the agenda of the conceptual art of the second half of the last century, one of the main tasks of which was to investigate the nature of art. In its content and function the *Dictionary* may be compared to the lexicographical literature produced by the representatives of other artistic movements; for example, the *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* composed by André Breton and Paul Éluard in 1938.⁶⁶ Both arrange concepts and ideas that circulated within these traditions in alphabetical order, accompanying each entry with what is ostensibly a short explanation supported by a bibliographical reference and/or the name of the person responsible for the emergence of a particular concept or idea. Unlike

⁶⁵ Dyogot and Zakharov have used the term “golden book” to refer to their 2005 WAM publication *Moskovskii kontseptualizm*. See pp. 8 and 10.

⁶⁶ André Breton and Paul Éluard, *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* (Paris: José Corti, 1991).

the surrealist *Dictionnaire*, the conceptualist one contains no images, underlining conceptual art's iconoclasm. But despite their status as "dictionaries," both seek to distance themselves from the academic conventions set for this category of literature, using more open and ludic approaches. For instance, the *Dictionary of Moscow Conceptualism*, like that of Surrealism, often fails to provide a clear definition of the concepts and principles at hand; on numerous occasions it omits bibliographical sources that would otherwise indicate where the reader might find a more detailed discussion of a given entry, often pointing instead to undocumented oral usages; or, instead of a definition, the editor provides a note stating that the artist has simply refused to offer an explanation for the term attributed to him.⁶⁷

It would perhaps be useful to discuss the *Dictionary*, or rather the editorial method employed by Monastyrsky, in comparison to a project initiated by a group of ex-surrealists and academics who regarded themselves in opposition to Breton's circle. The *Critical Dictionary* appeared as a monthly addendum to the art journal *Documents*, and was far more concerned with undermining *idées reçues* than with defining or explaining. Here Georges Bataille introduced, in the form of an entry, the notion of "formless" (*informe*)⁶⁸—an operation rather than a concept, a performative gesture that aims at transcending such established cultural dichotomies as form and content, formalism and iconology, art and science, beautiful and ugly, and civilized and primitive. Unlike the conventional intellectual

67 Sergei Anufriev introduced the entry "Clearness and Peace" (*iasnosti i pokoi*) into the *Dictionary*, but without defining it. For terms that omit bibliographical sources see for instance the entries for "schizoanalysis" (*Schizoanaliz*) or "rotten texts" (*gnilye teksty*). Andrei Monastyrsky, *Slovar' terminov moskovskoi kontseptual'noi shkoly*, 100.

68 "FORMLESS—A dictionary would begin as of the moment when it no longer provided the meaning of words but their tasks. In this way *formless* is not only an adjective having such and such a meaning, but a term serving to declassify, requiring in general that every thing should have a form. What it designates does not, in any sense whatever, possess rights, and everywhere gets crushed like a spider or an earthworm. For academics to be satisfied, it would be necessary, in effect, for the universe to take on a form...To affirm on the contrary that the universe resembles nothing at all and is only *formless*, amounts to saying that the universe is something akin to a spider or a gob of spittle." Georges Bataille et al., *Encyclopaedia Acephalica: Comprising the Critical Dictionary & Related Texts*, Atlas Arkhive (London: Atlas Press, 1995), 51.

procedures that seek to produce knowledge through the imposition of form (to “form” or to “inform”), the *informe*-as-method would demonstrate that the universe, as well as any discrete object within it, “resembles nothing at all.”⁶⁹

The category of “emptiness,” central for Moscow Conceptualism and discussed in more detail below, is comparable in many regards to Bataille’s “formless.” Both of these terms name operations or procedures that open up new nonauthoritative positions for writing, philosophizing, or art making, regardless of how paradoxical or absurd their results may appear. “Emptiness” appears in Monastyrsky’s *Dictionary* not only as an independent entry but also as a method, or rather as a lack of method (an “empty method,” to paraphrase one of KD’s key concepts), fully justifying the “incomplete” and “partial” character of lexicographical reference within the *Dictionary*, often to the point of frustrating academic inquiry. Unlike the “Critical Dictionary,” in which Bataille provides the entries with theorizations of their method and extensive explanations as to their tasks, the conceptualists’ *Dictionary*—like the *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme*—more resembles an index, or maybe even a search engine algorithm that helps redirect the reader to other sources and names. Although it lacks any clear theoretical elaboration of the overall method used by the conceptualists, remaining in this way truly faithful to the key category of “emptiness,” the *Dictionary* is nevertheless an indispensable inventory of the terms, procedures, and names that contributed to what is known as Moscow Conceptualism. Despite its differences from the “Critical Dictionary,” its main function is very close to what Bataille defines as the main job of a dictionary: it would begin “as of the moment when it no longer provided the meaning of words but their tasks.”⁷⁰

69 Ibid., On Bataille’s notion of *informe* see also Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless: A User’s Guide* (New York, Cambridge: Zone Books, 1997).

70 Ibid., 51.

Monastyrsky's *Dictionary* fulfills this task, for it presents the reader with those words, concepts, and ideas that acquired multiple meanings and tasks in the work of a group of artists, writers, and critics. Its major contribution, however, was to establish the discursive field of this tradition, to map that area of contemporary art and aesthetics that the conceptualist trod. The *Dictionary* may be regarded not only as a map for KD's *Journeys*, helping the lost traveler to navigate through its dense and often impenetrable content, but also as a valuable guide for those who embark upon any in-depth exploration of Moscow Conceptualism.

Chapter 2

MAPPING MOSCOW CONCEPTUALISM

The *Dictionary* defines “Moscow Conceptualism” as a “romantic, dreaming, and psychologizing version of the international conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s.”¹ This is a rather laconic definition for a term that has served this tradition for more than three decades. The following sections of this book provide a broader elucidation of such terms. Focusing not only on “Moscow Conceptualism” but also on the attribute “romantic” and the notion of “emptiness,” I aim to indicate how they originated and what range of significance they have acquired in their cultural milieus.

Groys has been credited with naming the KD group, having borrowed the phrase “collective actions” from the Venice Biennale catalog.² In this section I also argue that he should be credited for naming the larger context within which this group developed. The artists who were part of this broader community knew that what they were doing in the late seventies was called “conceptual art” in the West, and that accordingly they were all “conceptualists”—and yet they did not yet perceive themselves as part of that entity which later appeared under the designation “Moscow Romantic Conceptualism” or simply “Moscow Conceptualism.”³ It was only after Groys’s text in *A-Ya* that the names “Collective Actions group,” “Moscow Conceptualism,” and “Moscow Romantic Conceptualism” began to be used systematically and remained coextensive. This is perhaps yet another instance within contemporary art criticism when the function of critique

1 Monastyrsky, *Slovar’ terminov moskovskoi kontseptual’noi shkoly*, 61. See also the English translation in the Appendix.

2 For this see note 15 above as well as Monastyrsky’s interview with Hänsen in the foreword to the sixth volume of *Voprosy ob istorii “Kollektivnykh deistvii”* in Monastyrsky, “Poezdki za gorod, 6–10 vols” (unpublished, unpaginated).

3 For the entry “Moscow Conceptualism” the *Dictionary* provides Groys’s text from *A-Ya* as the first reference source. See Monastyrsky, *Slovar’ terminov moskovskoi kontseptual’noi shkoly*, 61.

is prospective rather than retrospective; that is, where the contemporary critic names in advance a cultural entity that does not yet have a name.⁴

Initially, Groys published "Moscow Romantic Conceptualism" in the Leningrad samizdat journal 37, and republished it in the first issue of the *A-Ya* journal.⁵ *A-Ya*, sponsored in part by the CIA,⁶ was one of the first official journals to present Russian (or Soviet) unofficial art abroad. It must be stressed here that even during the Soviet period the terms "unofficial/official" were at times misleading. In Moscow, the kind of art that Groys addressed in his article was called "unofficial" or "nonconformist," but as soon as the material crossed the borders of the USSR—sometimes recorded on a micro-tape recorder, placed in a cellophane bag, and hermetically sealed in a jam jar—and was presented by *A-Ya* or by the Contemporary Russian Art Center of America, it promptly became "contemporary art" or "contemporary Russian art."⁷ It was almost as if the tortuous process of delivery were responsible for the re-categorizing of what was in fact the same artwork.

In "Moscow Romantic Conceptualism"—a text considered sacred by this circle of artists—Groys introduced the Western reader to a new kind of art, one created within certain Moscow circles; he spoke of conceptualism

4 Other examples in which it was the critics who established the direction for an artistic movement include Pierre Restany's naming of *Nouveau Réalisme* and Germano Celant's naming of *Arte Povera*. (I am thankful to Kristine Stiles for this parallel.)

5 Dyogot and Zakharov, *Moskovskii kontseptualizm*, 351.

6 Solomon, *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost*, 108.

7 *A-Ya* (alternate titles *A-IA* and *A-JA*) was the USSR's major dissident art journal, edited from 1980 until 1986 by the émigré sculptor and abstract painter Igor Shelkovsky. Although printed in Paris, it acquired most of its material from Moscow and other cities in both Europe and North America. The following main objectives were announced on the inside cover of the first issue: "to acquaint Russian artists—in and outside Russia—with each other's work; to inform the reader about the artistic creativity and developments in contemporary Russian art." *A-Ya*, no. 1 (1979).

Another institute dedicated to Russian contemporary art, which was launched around the same time (early eighties) was the so-called "Contemporary Russian Art Center of America"—opened with the support of the Cremona Foundation directed by Norton Dodge, the main collector of Soviet nonconformist art. See Tupitsyn and Dodge, *Russian New Wave*. On the history of *A-Ya* see Matthew Baigell and Renee Baigell, *Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews after Perestroika* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 198; Solomon, *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost*, 108. On delivering submissions through customs see Baigell and Baigell, *Soviet Dissident Artists*, 198.

but defined it as “romantic” in order to draw a clear distinction between the conceptual art made in Moscow and that produced in the West (especially in the USA and the UK). According to the author, in the West conceptual art emerged when certain artists began to reclaim the institution of art criticism. For some time art criticism had ignored its original role as metalanguage, taking over some of the functions of the language of art. Following this interpretation, Western conceptualism was the outcome of the attempt of artists to regain control over the right to exercise critique over their work, as well as to explain their otherwise “incomprehensible” works to the public. In their attempts to deliver a certain transparency and clarity to the public, Western conceptualist artists tended to choose a scientific language—a language based on the description of concrete empirical experience.

In Russia, Groys argues further, where “it was impossible to paint a decent abstract picture without reference to the Holy light,”⁸ and where Western positivism had never been popular among writers and artists, the language that was used by a small group of conceptual artists was more lyrical, literary, and even mystical. This was due, in part, to the atmosphere surrounding the unofficial intellectuals during the seventies. Those who belonged to these unofficial circles in Moscow and Leningrad were immersed, already from the late fifties, in a religious atmosphere of sacrament and devotion.⁹ The romanticism of the first conceptualists also had something mystical and transcendental about it, and even Groys’s own texts from this period were attempts to write unofficial art criticism free of religious and mystical conventions.¹⁰ Before 1989, most

8 Groys, “Moscow Romantic Conceptualism,” 4.

9 For a more detailed description of this climate see Kabakov’s text “Air over Moscow” (*Vosdukh nad Moskvoy*) in Ilya Kabakov, *60-e–70-e: zapiski o neofitsial’noi zhizni v Moskve*, Wiener slawistischer Almanach. Sonderband; 47 (Vienna: Gesellschaft zur Förderung slawistischer Studien, 1999).

10 Groys wrote the text “Moscow Romantic Conceptualism” after he moved from Leningrad to Moscow, where he met Eduard Steinberg, Viktor Pivovarov, and Ilya Kabakov. Earlier in 1977, while still in Leningrad, Groys published (under the pseudonym I. Suitzidov [Suicidal]) another text, titled “Existential Preconditions for Conceptual Art.” This appeared in the Leningrad samizdat journal 37, and has been regarded as a polemic against the quasireligious understanding of art that dominated unofficial circles at that time. See Groys, *Existentsial’nye predposylki kontseptual’nogo iskusstva*, in Dyogot and Zakharov, *Moskovskii kontseptualizm*, 332–42.

aesthetic and political resistance to the governing regime was informed by the theosophical heritage of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century thinkers, who in their time had opposed Western ideas of socialism, progress, and Enlightenment. The fact that these artists (many of whom were of Jewish descent) had recourse to Christian Orthodox theories was partly due to severe censorship and to the lack of information on the progress of other intellectual traditions. Even after 1989, when many conceptualists had gained access to earlier suppressed Western intellectual debates (resorting often to Freud or to French critical theory), many of their texts still appeared as an intellectual engagement with Russian nineteenth-century Christian Orthodox theological and philosophical thought.¹¹

The word “romantic,” to which I shall return to discuss in more detail within the context of the conceptualists’ predecessors, was thus chosen as a compromise between the prevailing religious mysticism among the Soviet unofficial artists and the rationalistic tendencies manifest in Western contemporary art. In comparison to Joseph Kosuth and Art & Language, who both used a clear and a rationalizing language to describe and analyze the nature of art, the Muscovites, who were at that time caught within an epistemological and ideological vacuum, did indeed seem more lyrical and even “romantic” in the way in which they made use of language. Thus the designation “romantic conceptualism” suggests how two kind of conceptual artists, on either side of the Iron Curtain, used language as a tool: the Western conceptualists employed it in a more analytical, systematic, and specialized mode, whereas the Moscow conceptualists resorted to more literary or poetic modes. Of course, one must also keep in mind that when Groys introduces the division between Moscow “romantics” versus Western “rationalists,” this must be understood as a critical device, an interpretation of this phenomenon that draws upon longstanding intellectual traditions: “romantic” and “spiritual” versus “pragmatic” and “rational” belong here to enduring techniques of self-presentation that have historically evolved within certain Russian intellectual circles.

11 This occurs in some parts of Boris Groys, *Utopia i obmen*. Another good example is Yuri Leiderman, “Nikolai Fiodorov i Venera Stockman,” in *Moskovskii kontseptualizm*, ed. Ekaterina Dyogot and Vadim Zakharov, *World Art Muzei* no. 15–16 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo WAM, 2008).

Kabakov did not like the designation “Moscow Conceptualism” because the phrase “sounds both parochial and epigonic to Western ears.”¹² In his text “Conceptualism in Russia,” this artist strove to track down the essence of Russian Conceptualism, like Groys comparing local conceptual art to foreign versions. But in doing so, Kabakov shifted the emphasis from Moscow to Russia, even suggesting that the title of his article should have been “Russian Conceptualism” instead of “Conceptualism in Russia.” One cannot fail to observe a certain confusion that persists in the literature with regard to geography and politics. Groys links this cultural manifestation to Moscow by calling it “Moscow Romantic Conceptualism” or “Moscow Conceptualism”; Kabakov is inclined more toward the designation “Russian Conceptualism”; and Monastyrsky prefers to speak of “Soviet Conceptualism.” Groys’s version prevailed.¹³

In his article “Conceptualism in Russia,” Kabakov suggests that Russian culture has always been conceptual. “As always happens, a phenomenon living surreptitiously and for a long time ‘over here’ one day acquires a name that arrives from ‘over there.’”¹⁴ According to Kabakov, when Russian artists discovered that “over there” (in the West) there was something called “conceptualism,” they soon realized that an analogous phenomenon had always existed in Russia, and that this phenomenon had long been one of the most important “constituent parts of our ‘artistic’ outlook on the world.”¹⁵

12 See Matthew Jesse Jackson, “Answers of the experimental group: Ilya Kabakov, Moscow conceptualism, Soviet avant-gardes” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2003), n. 87.

13 Although it is possible to make a case for “Soviet Conceptualism” by bringing in examples of conceptual art from the Baltic states, the designation “Russian Conceptualism” remains much more problematic. In Leningrad (the northern capital of Russia) a more internationally oriented generation of artists including Timur Novikov and Afrika (Sergei Bugaev) emerged relatively late, in the eighties, but they could hardly be classified as conceptualists. For the text “Conceptualism in Russia” see Kabakov, *Das Leben der Fliegen*, 122. For the situation of unofficial art in Leningrad see Kathrin Becker and Barbara Straka, *Selbstidentifikation: Positionen St. Petersburger Kunst von 1970 bis heute / Self-identification: Positions in St. Petersburg Art from 1970 until Today* (Berlin: Haus am Waldsee, 1994).

14 Kabakov, *Das Leben der Fliegen*, 122.

15 Ibid., 246.

If the art critic Groys understood the difference between Western and Moscow conceptual art with reference to broader abstract categories (e.g., analytic versus romantic, or positivism versus metaphysics), then the artist Kabakov drew the distinction between Western and Russian conceptualism from his observations on how the two cultures relate to the physical object. In the West, writes Kabakov, conceptual art unfolds according to the principle of *quid pro quo* (this for that). Marcel Duchamp, to whom the conceptualists owe a great deal, was among the first to substitute, according to Kabakov's definition, one thing for another: the *Urinal* took its place alongside paintings and sculptures, replacing an art object (a painting or a sculpture) with an industrially produced (ready-made) item. With the emergence and consolidation of conceptualism in the sixties, moreover, it was the idea, the concept, that came to replace the artistic object. Concepts, which before were used only as signs or symbols to name and explain art objects, began to make greater demands, representing and even replacing objects. Western conceptualists insisted on the dematerialization or even the complete abolishment of the object, as well as of those specific artistic contexts (museums and galleries) that conferred upon these objects their special artistic aura. The attack launched by Western conceptualism on the art object and its context was part of a larger critique against the increasing commodification of life and art that emerged, spread, and grew during the sixties.

In Russia, according to Kabakov, everything was different: the principle "one thing instead of another" did not work because there was no "other": it was simply not there, it was missing. "It is in itself," he insisted, "an undivided unknownness, a complete emptiness" (126). In order to illustrate this lack of an "other"—this missing "b" in the formula "*a* instead of *b*"—Kabakov turns to nineteenth-century Russian literature, discussing the writing techniques of Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov. Dostoevsky, for instance, dedicates so much time and text to inexhaustible monologues about a thing or an idea that the reader eventually begins to lose the thread of the story. Such a way of writing transforms the described object into a sheer absurdity, an emptiness that spreads along interminable paragraphs. These are not discussions, says Kabakov, but discussions of discussions (128). Gogol, likewise, uses such a degree of precision, such an amount of detail in his depictions of characters and objects, that as a result, instead of becoming more clear and prominent, they disappear, becoming fantastic, absurd, and empty.

While Kabakov does not refer directly to Gogol's *Dead Souls* (1842), that work also readily illustrates his missing "b." *Dead Souls* tells the story of Chichikov, a nineteenth-century Russian landlord who, in order to "increase" his wealth, would buy up "dead souls"—that is, the names of those serfs who had died but were still listed in official governmental registers. This peculiar relation between a defunct person and the name that survives him—between a name and a nonexistent object, or between a concept on one side and emptiness on another, was to become one of the main themes and motifs in Moscow Conceptualism. (Gogol's idea of buying dead souls was, for instance, re-enacted by the Sots artists Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid after their arrival in New York, and one of the first "souls," which was bought for \$0, belonged to Andy Warhol.)¹⁶ Monastyrsky writes: "Conceptualism in the Soviet Union is not an accident, but is related to our system, to our social sphere, where the object plays a very small role. We practically live in a conceptual space."¹⁷ In the words of Sven Gundlach, "One can understand that conceptualism and the Soviet cultural system were the same, producing not things, but the ideas of things."¹⁸ More recently, Yuri Leiderman has worked with the metaphor of the columbarium tablet, where one side, the one that faces the viewer, bears the name of the deceased person in between two dates along with an occasional epitaph, whereas the other side faces the darkness and the emptiness of the funeral niche—where it is not even clear if the ashes preserved there belong to the deceased, or if any are there at all. Leiderman finds there both a real and a transcendental emptiness.¹⁹ It should be added to all this that when Kabakov speaks of "conceptualism in Russia" he does not refer so much to conceptualism as a concrete institution of contemporary art as to a certain tendency in Russian culture to "be conceptual," a notion possibly akin to those in which all Russians are "romantic," "mysterious," or "wild." In any case, most of the theories regarding the origins or the nature of Moscow Romantic Conceptualism revolve around the idea of absence, of lack, of something missing, of emptiness, and indeed over time the notion of "emptiness" (*pustota*) came forward to become one of the main themes of this tradition.

16 See the receipt in Dyogot and Zakharov, *Moskovskii kontseptualizm*, 155.

17 Quoted in Bobrinskaia, *Kontseptualizm*, [unpaginated].

18 Quoted in Solomon, *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost*, 86–7.

19 Leiderman, "Nikolai Fiodorov i Venera Stockman."

For conceptualism, which shifted the emphasis in the late-twentieth century art from the material domain of the object to that of immaterial language, the process of identifying and naming neglected or overlooked realities and experiences has been a favored artistic strategy. For Moscow conceptualists the process of naming is particularly important, as they have inhabited for several decades a discursive space crowded with terms, concepts, and expressions that were invented in order to name and describe gestures, actions, objects, and various ways of producing and exhibiting their art. They also came up with numerous ways of describing themselves. Some of these words became more popular than others, but they all have been collected and preserved.

Artists and critics have proposed various ways of charting Moscow Conceptualism, proposing to group its affiliates according to diverse principles: a favored medium; adherence to a circle, group, style, or generation; or even according to certain psychological or emotional types. I have already mentioned the generational division of Moscow Conceptualism (SEE NOTE 49 ABOVE), as well as indicated a loose grouping of these artists, writers, and poets into various circles; for example, the “Kabakov circle” to which KD belonged.²⁰ The changing variety of mapping strategies and definitions reflects the internal dynamics of this tradition—those processes that continued over the years and across a rapidly changing sociopolitical context—and has also generated new terms, words, phrases, and concepts that have enlarged the discursive field of Moscow Conceptualism.

Attempts have been made to articulate the conceptualist tradition into diverse terms. Beside the established term “Moscow Romantic Conceptualism,” for example, several others have been suggested. For instance, Viktor Tupitsyn proposed “Moscow Communal Conceptualism,” putting the accent on the word “communal.” He suggested in this way that communality should be understood not as the “communist society” promoted by Marxism-Leninism, and neither as the traditional Russian village commune (*obschina*)—a social order regarded by some Slavophiles as the most suited for Russia—but as a “community of Moscow alternative artists involved in the creation of textual objects.”²¹ Thus Tupitsyn’s term

20 For a discussion of various circles within Moscow unofficial art circles see Solomon, *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost*, 80–112.

21 Tupitsyn, *Kommunal’nyi (post)modernizm: russkoe iskusstvo vtoroi poloviny XX veka*. See also Monastyrsky, *Slovar’ terminov moskovskoi kontseptual’noi shkoly*, 60.

places the emphasis on the relations among these artists, and makes “Moscow Communal Conceptualism” part of a larger category that he termed “Communal Postmodernism.”²² The latter branched off, in the early seventies, from the “Communal Modernism” of the fifties and sixties, and reached its peak toward the mid-seventies with the emergence, on the Moscow unofficial scene, of a new generation of artists and artists groups (i.e., KD, Nest, and Mukhomor), often called the second generation of Moscow Conceptualism.

Earlier, in the eighties, Moscow conceptualists had used the acronym “MANI” (the Moscow Archive of New Art; see above) to denote their circle. “NOMA” (Pavel Pepperstein’s term) came to stand for a circle of people who describe themselves by means of a jointly developed set of linguistic practices, and it was used, especially in the early nineties, to refer to the central figures and the main texts of Moscow conceptualists.²³ Throughout the nineties the artists belonging to this circle referred to themselves as the “Moscow noma” (*moskovskaia noma*) or the “circle noma” (*krug noma*). “Estonia” was another term introduced early that decade to designate other regroupings of younger conceptualists,²⁴ and still in the nineties Monastyrsky introduced the term “Moksha” to refer to the third phase of Moscow Conceptualism’s evolution.²⁵ In the late eighties and early nineties the term “Psychedelic Conceptualism” was introduced and used by the members of the Medical Hermeneutics (Medgerminevtika)

22 Tupitsyn’s periodization runs as follows: “Communal Modernism is a set of aesthetic views and practices practiced by alternative Soviet artists and writers from the end of the 1950s till the beginning of the 1970s. The communality of Communal Modernism consists in the fact that its representatives were united in unofficial collective bodies, not in a compulsory (institutional) way but of their own accord. We can speak of a form of ‘contractual communality.’ Communal Postmodernism emerged at the beginning of the 1970s and from that moment it developed in parallel with Communal Modernism. Moscow Communal Conceptualism is part of Communal Postmodernism.” *Tupitsyn, Kommunal’nyi (post)modernizm*, 53.

23 Monastyrsky, *Slovar’ terminov moskovskoi kontseptual’noi shkoly*, 65.

24 *Estonia*—the name of a circle, which to some extent came to replace NOMA. The circle Estonia consisted of the groups MG (Medgerminevtika), SSV, The Fourth Height, Fenzo, Russia, Tartu, Piarnu, and others. It was formed in the period after the second coup, in 1993. *Ibid.*, 98–9.

25 Moksha—Moscow Conceptual School. The third phase of development of Moscow Conceptualism after MANI and NOMA. *Ibid.*, 60.

group. "Psychedelic Conceptualism" is defined in the *Dictionary* as a new tendency that "came to replace the 'romantic conceptualism' of the seventies and eighties, representing a critical and aesthetic manipulation of (collective or individual) psychedelic material."²⁶ Monastyrsky's novel *Kashirskoe Road (Kashirskoe Shosse)*, published in 1998 as part of the first five volumes of the *Journeys*, where the author describes a psychotic episode from his life, was regarded by the Medical Hermeneutics artists as their initial point of departure. Thus, from the perspective of some artists of the last generation, Moscow Conceptualism can be divided into "romantic" (Kabakov, KD) and "psychedelic" (Medical Hermeneutics).

Other ways have been proposed of arranging the Moscow conceptualists. Some have suggested a tripartite order of dominant media, where Kabakov represents (from 1986 on) the art of installation, Vadim Zakharov printing, and KD performances and actions.²⁷ Others have argued that the "Moscow school" needs to be divided into three branches: "romantic conceptualism" (the circle of Kabakov), the "analytical conceptualism" practiced by Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, and "inductive conceptualism," the method favored by KD.²⁸ A binary arrangement has also been put forward: one group assembles all those who earned their daily living by illustrating humanistic literature (especially children books) and another would incorporate all those who worked as illustrators for technical and scientific publications.²⁹

In 1991 Ekaterina Dyogot proposed a quadrilateral method of charting the Moscow noma, taking as her point of departure the concept of "privacy" (*privatnost'*).³⁰ Dyogot uses this concept (discussed above as "private art" [*privatnoe iskusstvo*] with regard to the term "group")³¹ in order to emphasize once again the overall individual or personal character of

²⁶ Ibid., 180.

²⁷ Monastyrsky, "Poezdki za gorod, 6–10 vols." [unpaginated].

²⁸ For the division into "romantic," "analytic," and "inductive" see Gennady Donskoy, Michael Roshal, and Viktor Skersis, *Gnezdo (The Nest)* (Moscow: National Center for Contemporary Art, 2008), 17.

²⁹ The suggestion to classify the conceptualists according to their official employment by "humanistic" versus "scientific" publishers belongs to Yuri Leiderman. Interview with the author, Moscow, Russia, July 24, 2006.

³⁰ Ekaterina Dyogot, "Priiatnye zaniatia," *Tvorchestvo*, no. 11 (1991): 18.

³¹ On "private art" (*privatnoe iskusstvo*) see also Eimermacher and Margulis, *Ot edinstva k mnogoobraziiu*, 53.

this tradition, and to suggest that the conceptualists differed from their predecessors—both the historical avant-garde and the post-World War II modernists—in that they were predominantly concerned not with social or collective issues but rather with matters of personal freedom and individual self-discovery. The series of oppositions that Dyogot proposes are centered on the concept of “privacy” and on various modes of defining individual psychological space.

In this version of the map of “private” Moscow Conceptualism, the artists are arranged according to a series of psychological dichotomies: introverts versus extroverts and “existential” versus “character (role-playing)” (FIGURE 2).³² The “existential” and “character” types are further elucidated by more colloquial versions of psychological typologies: those conceptualists who are believed to be *sebe na ume* (literally “in one’s mind”) and those who are *ne v svoem ume* (“out of one’s mind”). The former expression is often used in Russian to describe those regarded as reserved, self-absorbed, or contemplative, those believed to be introspective and concerned principally with personal affairs. The opposite type, *ne v svoem ume* denotes (like its English equivalent), either someone who is believed to

PRIVACY OF OCCUPATION	Existential “in one’s mind” (sub-depressive)	Character (role-playing) “out of one’s mind” (para-manical)
Introvent, (mental practice; “play beads”)	V. Pivovarov A. Monastyrsky Y. Leiderman S. Anufriev P. Papperstein M. Serebreakova A. Zhuravlev V. Zakharov	I. Kabakov Y. Albert Puzzles A.Olishvang Tactics
Extrovert (production; “cast beads”)	A Filippov K. Zvezdochetov	L. Zvezdochetova O. Chemysheva D. Gutov M. Konstantinova

FIGURE 2: E. DYOGOT, “CLASSIFICATION OF MOSCOW CONCEPTUALISM,” 1991 (RECONSTRUCTED)

32 Dyogot, “Priiatnye zaniatia,” 18.

be “crazy,” someone who is predominantly concerned with external things, or someone who acts out his or her emotions and beliefs. These two poles can also be understood in terms of the psychological and psychoanalytic types “neurotic” and “psychotic,” as suggested by Dyogot’s further addition of the opposition “sub-depressive” versus “para-maniacal” (FIGURE 2).

In her elaborations of this quadrilateral map of Moscow Conceptualism, Dyogot also makes a series of references to Hermann Hesse’s novel *Das Glasperlenspiel* (*The Glass Bead Game*, 1943), a book that has had a great impact on the Moscow conceptualists. Drawing on this novel she constructs two other sets, establishing an opposition between those artists who “play beads”—that is, the “introverts” who favor intellectual activities and dedicate their lives to the cultivation of the mind—and those who “cast beads,” meaning those extrovert artists who favor more manual, “worldly,” or materially oriented artistic activities. According to this map, Monastyrsky and the members of Medical Hermeneutics fall in the category of existential introverts devoted to the “bead game,” for their artistic activities unfolded predominantly “in their minds”; that is, their work was largely conceptual and language-based. The more materially oriented extrovert artists, such as Konstantin Zvezdochetov and Dmitry Gutov, are categorized as “casting beads” because their work materializes above all “out of their minds”; that is, in the form of concrete artistic objects or, as Dyogot writes, “on their fingers” (*na pal’ tsakh*).³³

The conceptualist quadrilateral can also be read according to the category of “emptiness” that is central to this tradition. Those grouped in the introvert columns are the artists who prefer more mental or conceptual practices; to use the terminology of Western conceptualism, these are the artists who are dedicated to the dematerialization of art and for whom language is the primary material (especially in the “Introvert/Existential” column). Those categorized in the extrovert tables tend toward “fullness,” or toward materialization and the production of tangible artworks. By the end of the nineties, and especially into the next century, those placed in the latter category, especially the “out of their minds” or role-playing

33 See Figure 2 (translated and reconstructed by the author).

extroverts, had been largely left out of the “golden” circle of Moscow Conceptualism.³⁴ This tendency speaks again to a certain propensity of those who formed the nucleus or the canon of Moscow Conceptualism to exclude the bead-casters, the manually or materially oriented artists, from their conceptualist circle, as if suggesting that this tradition was reserved for the introverts—for those who played mental games and who recognized the notion of “emptiness” as their sacrament.

Among all these attempts to comprehend the discursive field of Moscow Conceptualism, there have been also those who have gone so far as to dismiss the entire tradition. Nikita Alexeev, one of KD’s members, states: “Moscow Conceptualism never existed. . . . Conceptual art for me is a limited number of British, American, and a few German, Italian, and French artists.”³⁵ Some critics outside of the Moscow circle have implied that Moscow Conceptualism was a matter less of beads than of Chinese Whispers, for in the Soviet period many of the Western cultural influences that made it over the Iron Curtain and reached Moscow were often altered or denatured within the local cultural context. As put by Vasilii Rakitin:

In the West, as a rule, conceptualism presupposes the triumph of intellect, of theory over spontaneous emotion. That is, theory is not a servant to art but is the art itself. The term “conceptualism” in Moscow, during the first half of the 1980s and later, played a collective function, as the term “futurism” did in the 1910s.³⁶

Indeed, the history of the emergence of the designation “conceptualism” in Moscow shares many similarities with the Eastern careers of other Western art historical epithets. In the early twentieth century, for example, Velimir Khlebnikov declared that the term “futurism” in Russia was a pure accident, and instead coined and promoted the neologism *budetlianin* (man of the future or futurian). Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, on the other hand, was very critical of how the Russians used his term “futurism.” When presented with examples of *zaum* poetry during his 1914 tour

34 See for instance the “golden book” of Moscow Conceptualism, which does not include any of the “extrovert” artists in the circle of Moscow Conceptualism. Dyogot and Zakharov, *Moskovskii kontseptualizm*. Such artists as D. Gutov did indeed moved toward a more constructivist or activist art.

35 Donskoy et al., *Gnezdo* [*The Nest*], 21.

36 Rakitin, “Russkaia volna, kazhetsea, poshla na spad,” 26.

to Moscow and St. Petersburg, he reacted by calling it too “abstract,” a “pseudo-futurism,” more “*plusquamperfectum* than *futurum*,” proposing instead that the Russians collect their experiments under the designation “savagism.”³⁷ Breton voiced a similar concern in 1935, writing that “the greatest danger threatening Surrealism today is the fact that because of its spread throughout the world, which was very sudden and rapid, the word [“surrealism”] found favor much faster than the idea, and all sorts of more or less questionable creations tend to pin the Surrealist label on themselves: thus works tending to be ‘abstractivist,’ in Holland, in Switzerland, and according to very recent reports in England, manage to enjoy ambiguous neighborly relations with Surrealist works.”³⁸

Despite arguments both pro and con, however, and frequent questioning as to whether the term “conceptualism” appropriately described the art of certain Moscow artists and poets, “Moscow Conceptualism” remained to collect under its umbrella other words and concepts that accumulated and proliferated over the years. “Romantic,” “Emptiness,” “Psychedelic,” “Inductive,” “Analytical,” “Communal,” “MANI,” “Apt-art,” “Tot-Art,” “NOMA,” “Estonia,” “KLAVA” (Club of the Avantgardists—the first officially registered Moscow artist association), “Moksha,” and many others are not merely names, but have been used in order to express new directions, tendencies, and attributes; shared aesthetic views; alliances; and the emergence of new groups during the more than thirty year history of Moscow Conceptualism.³⁹ Two of these concepts, however—“romantic” and “emptiness”—have received more attention than others, as they have often been used to express what was unique about this cultural tradition.

37 See Vladimir Markov, *The Longer Poems of Velimir Khlebnikov*, University of California publications in modern philology (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 3. See also Vladimir Markov, *Russian Futurism; a history* (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1969), 157.

38 See “Surrealist Situation of the Object” in André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 257.

39 For a translation and an elucidation of some of these terms see the Appendix.

THE ATTRIBUTE “ROMANTIC”

Among many definitions of “romantic,” the one proposed by Groys more than three decades ago remains the most popular. By drawing the division between Moscow and Western conceptual art along the lines of scientific positivism versus metaphysical or mystical romanticism—the cognitive faculties versus the “soul”—Groys followed a path similar to that of writers and thinkers who have speculated, since the nineteenth century, about the existence of a “mysterious Russian soul”—a certain type of *duchovnosti* (spirituality) with which the Russians have been blessed.⁴⁰ From the perspective of the present, Groys’s understanding of “Moscow Romantic Conceptualism” as “proof of the surviving unity of the ‘Russian spirit’” is a remnant of that quasireligious understanding of art that at the time dominated unofficial circles, and from which the young critic was working to liberate himself.⁴¹ Thus the term “romantic” has often been used as a synonym for “spiritual” and “mystical,” part of the myth of the enigmatic “Russian soul,” a constant presence within the pro-Slavophile unofficial circles of Moscow and especially in Groys’s own Leningrad as well as among Russian émigrés in the West.

Placing this metaphysical entity (the Russian soul) aside, it is possible to find more clearly factual causes for the emergence of the attribute “romantic.” It is true that one can explain it as a cultural phenomenon arising from the general atmosphere of the seventies (something that Kabakov does with great skill in his recollections),⁴² and argue that part of the sense of romantic mystery comes as a result of that all-enshrouding Soviet foggiess which rendered everything secretive and enigmatic. But

40 Groys’s statement that the form of transparency toward which the American and English conceptual artists strove was inspired by the language of scientific experiment (Groys 1979, p. 4) is regarded today as somewhat general and imprecise. In 1969 (ten years before his text) Sol Lewitt wrote that “conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists; they leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.” See Sol Lewitt, “Sentences on Conceptual Art,” in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings*, ed. Kristine Stiles (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966). 826–7.

41 The reference to the Russian spirit was then picked up by other critics who wrote about this phenomenon. See Bobrinskaia, *Kontseptualizm*, [unpaginated]. For the quasireligious atmosphere of criticism see Dyogot and Zakharov, *Moskovskii kontseptualizm*, 332–42.

42 Kabakov, 60-e—70-e: *zapiski o neofitsial’noi zhizni v Moskve*.

there was also something in that climate that surrounded the unofficial art scene in particular, a quality that was later transferred to the next generations of artists, to the conceptualists. The word “romantic” would point in this case to a reaction, or to a series of reactions, that took place in Moscow unofficial circles and led to the emergence of what would later be called Moscow Conceptualism—when the worldviews of two generations of unofficial artists fused and produced an interstice, something “between,” neither very Russian nor yet Western, something synthetic, much like the project of the historical Romantics.

Artists and critics often speak of a “paradigm shift” or a “split” that took place within Moscow unofficial culture in the seventies.⁴³ The aforementioned transition from “communal modernism” to “communal postmodernism” described by V. Tupitsyn also refers to this change. Kabakov describes this historical shift in a more metaphorical sense, comparing how two generations of unofficial artists would have looked at a Soviet propaganda poster depicting an index finger pointing toward the bright future. While the modernists of the sixties looked in the direction indicated by the finger, criticizing that to which it pointed (the red horizon of the promised communist future), the first generation of conceptualists began instead to closely inspect the painted fingertip itself. “It became possible not to look where the finger was pointing but to turn one’s head and look at this finger.” To use a similar analogy employed by Kabakov to describe the paradigm shift, “instead of marching to the rhythm of loud propagandistic music amplified via megaphone, we stopped and began to stare dully at that megaphone.”⁴⁴ The new generation scrutinized the fingertip, completely ignoring the direction in which it was pointing; its members ceased listening to the message that came through the Politburo’s megaphone, choosing instead to look more closely into the devices used for the diffusion of ideology. Unlike the previous generations of Moscow unofficial artists, who tended to take the language of the Politburo seriously, reaching for religious or existential themes to criticize its main premises, the conceptualists abandoned this sort of criticism and resorted instead to the examination and investigation of its ethos and its

⁴³ For this “paradigm shift” see Donskoy et al., *Gnezdo (The Nest)*; for “split” see *Raskol sovetskogo iskusstva* in Eimermacher and Margulis, *Ot edinstva k mnogoobraziiu*, 75–6. For a more detailed account on the nature of this transition see Kabakov, *60-e—70-e: zapiski o neofitsial’noi zhizni v Moskve*.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 75.

mechanisms of distribution. Whereas the modernists were concerned with the content of Soviet ideology, denouncing its internal ideatic or ideological components, the younger conceptualists began to engage critically with its form. While some of the Sots Art conceptualists (Komar and Melamid) treated the language of ideology with unreserved irony and humor, those who were part of Kabakov's circle embarked upon a more hermeneutically inclined inspection. Their close explorations resembled neither a detailed scientific investigation nor a metaphysical or theoretical interpretation, but was instead more like a Buddhist meditation—a prolonged concentration on the object to the point that both the painted fingertip and the megaphone disappear, revealing emptiness. KD in particular favored such an approach. What the Moscow conceptualists describe as a “paradigm shift” was conditioned first of all by a series of political events. At the 24th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), in 1971, Brezhnev introduced the notion of “developed socialism,” an evident deviation from early Soviet leaders' ambitions to proceed from capitalism through socialism into communism. Khrushchev had planned to catch up with the West in the early 1970s and by the 1980s to step into communism. Brezhnev's “developed socialism” was a postponement of communism; it indirectly expressed Soviet citizens' massive loss of faith in the judgment of their leaders.⁴⁵ The emergence of conceptual art in Moscow may thus be regarded as a cultural reaction to these political and ideological changes, or even as a response to the official postponement of communism.

The transformations taking place at high political levels were also affecting the Moscow unofficial art circles. This appeared above all as a change in terminology. If during the fifties and sixties the artists of this milieu referred to themselves as *podpol'nye* (the underground, which translated literally means “under the floor”) or as some artists ironically called it, *zashkafnoe* (literally “behind the dresser”), after the infamous Bulldozer Exhibition of 1974 the new term *neofitsial'nyi* (unofficial) settled in, and after that came the term “nonconformist.”⁴⁶ Both the transition

⁴⁵ Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle, *Brezhnev reconsidered* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 165–7.

⁴⁶ “In the sixties the [unofficial] artists were called ‘underground,’ then in the seventies they were called ‘unofficial’ then later [or the other way around?] ‘nonconformists,’ and now [1980s] I even don't know. In one catalog I even encountered the term ‘un-hang-able’ (*nevvyeshivaemye*).” Kabakov, *60-e—70-e: zapiski o neofitsial'noi zhizni v Moskve*, 20 and 153–5.

from Khrushchev's "communism" to Brezhnev's "developed socialism" (postponed communism, or as some critics later put it, a passage from modernism to postmodernism) and the sharp and antagonistic split among Moscow artists and writers between "official" and "unofficial" can be regarded as reflections of the same paradigm shift.

The causes and consequences of this change of gear in the machinery of the Soviet Politburo came after a series of transformations that began after the death of Stalin. Alexei Yurchak has recently described these changes, which followed the processes of destalinization initiated by Khrushchev, in terms of a "performative shift" that involved a series of radical transformations that touched upon many aspects of social and political life.⁴⁷ With reference to John Austin's distinction between constative and performative utterance, Yurchak proposes his own theory, suggesting that until 1950 the authoritative Soviet discourse (including but not limited to party texts, speeches, directives, editorials, official art, literature, history, and science) was constantly supervised by an "external editorial position."⁴⁸ Stalin, in other words, personally oversaw ideological discourse, in part by meticulously editing works of history, language, philosophy, literature, film, and art, and verifying how adequately artists, linguists, scientists, composers, and filmmakers represented the Soviet reality. After his death, but especially after the semipublic denouncement of his personality cult, this position was diminished; the authoritative figure, the "master," who positioned himself externally to the space of the ideological enunciation, had vanished. This led to a radical readjustment not only in the way in which the authoritative ideological mechanism interacted

47 See in particular Chapter 1 in Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

48 Yurchak constructs his argument on what he calls "Lefort's paradox," which concerns the external position of the authoritative figure vis-à-vis the space of the ideological enunciation. *Ibid.*, 10–16. For a discussion of the position of authority see also Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London; New York: Verso, 1989), 145–47.

with the masses, but also affected the form, content, syntax, and even the style of language employed within the ideological machinery. “Since there was no longer any unambiguous and uniquely explained external canon against which to calibrate one’s own texts for ideological precision,”⁴⁹ party language became increasingly uniform and predictable, relying on endless rewriting, rearrangement, and re-editing of the same content, evolving finally into the infamous *langue de bois* or “wooden language” of the Soviet bureaucracy.

One could say that in the previous authoritarian decades everyone would have assumed that a pointing finger on a poster could belong only to the master, to the ruler, to “the father of all the nations”—that is to say, to the great leader and teacher, Stalin. In the subsequent totalitarian decades it became increasingly clear that this finger could not be attributed to anyone in particular, and was replaced by the anonymous collective finger of the amorphous and compound body of the Politburo. The performative shift consisted, then, of a transfer of power from a personal authority to a collective one, from an authoritarian to a centralized totalitarian agency—a transference that led to a series of further transformations within the structure of ideological discourse and of the everyday life of citizens. It became particularly obvious during the seventies that the ideological canon was maintained through a series of closely observed rituals. The change may then be understood in terms of a shift from a political culture of declarative or constative utterance—which Austin defines as having the property of truth or falsity—to one of performative utterance, which can be neither true nor false, and instead has “its own special job, it is used to perform an action.”⁵⁰ Actions, in both political and artistic contexts, can also be understood in terms of a series of rituals that must be observed and performed regularly in order to maintain the status quo. Thus the shift from constative to performative utterance, to which I return when I discuss the work of KD in more detail, would also explain the emergence of a group of unofficial artists who began both to exploit and undermine the new political and social circumstances.

49 Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More*, 47.

50 For the distinction between constative and performative utterances see John Austin, “Performative-Constative,” in *Philosophy of Language: The Central Topics*, edited by Susana Nuccetelli and Gary Seay. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 329.

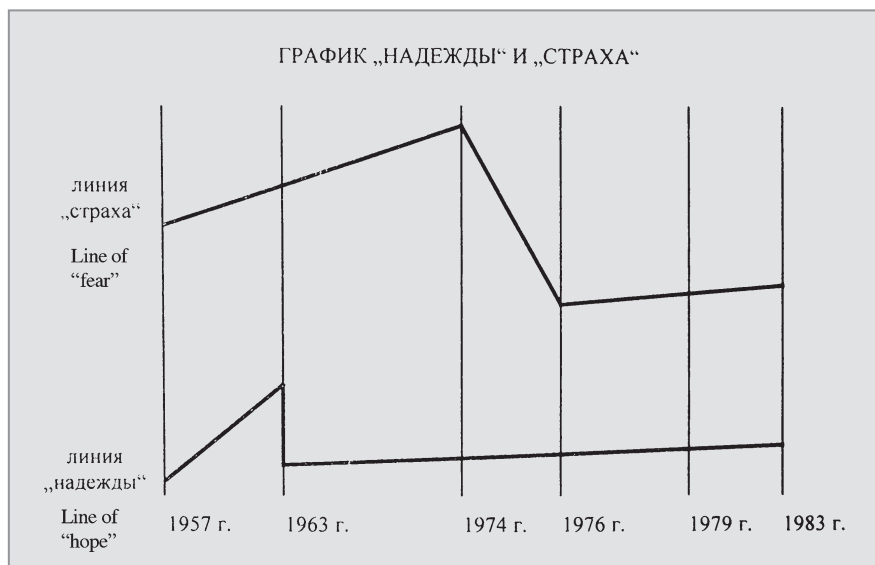


FIGURE 3: ILYA KABAOKV, DIAGRAM OF "HOPE" AND "FEAR," CIRCA 1980 (MODIFIED)

The unsanctioned Bulldozer Exhibition was the first to break the ice and to force the authorities to modify their views on artistic dissent.⁵¹ Shortly thereafter, officials approved an "unofficial" open-air exhibition, the "Second Fall Open-Air Show of Painting," which took place in Moscow's Izmailovo Park and was dubbed the "Soviet Woodstock."⁵² After these events the emerging conceptualists—especially the second generation, to which KD belonged—were no longer "underground" but rather "unofficial," a designation that was much easier to bear. No longer was there any

51 The Bulldozer Exhibition, one of the first exhibitions of unofficial art, took place at the outskirts of Moscow on September 15, 1974. The "First Fall Open-Air Show of Painting," as it was called, an unsanctioned event, was wrecked by the authorities with bulldozers and firehoses. Among the participants were O. Rabin, S. Glezer, V. Vorobiov, Komar & Melamid, L. Masterkova, V. Nemukhin, and others. Some materials on the Bulldozer Exhibition are available in Aleksandr Glezer, *Lianozovskaia grupa: istoki i sud'by: sbornik materialov i katalog k vystavke v Gosudarstvennoi Tretiakovskoi galeree, 10 marta-10 apreliia 1988: Tabakman museum of contemporary Russian art (New York), 15 May-15 June 1998* (Moscow: "Rasters," 1998). For the Bulldozer Exhibition see also Solomon, *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost*, 89–90.

52 The term "Soviet Woodstock" originated with the publication of a *TIME Magazine* article. See "The Russian Woodstock," *TIME Magazine* (October 14, 1974).

reason to hide. Instead, one had only to accept that one would remain unacceptable. In Kabakov's diagram above, the "Diagram of Hope and Fear" (FIGURE 3), the artist indicates that this historical moment was marked by a sudden decrease of fear, accompanied however by a decrease of hope. The horizontal "line of fear," upon crossing the vertical line of the year 1974, abruptly plunges down, indicating a turning point in Soviet politics under Brezhnev, and the beginning of the phase known as *zastoi* (stagnation).

To return then to the examination of the attribute "romantic" in the context of this tradition, one may say that Moscow Conceptualism came as a result of a generational clash when younger artists—some of whom will be later considered "first generation conceptualists" (Ilya Kabakov, Viktor Pivovarov, Erik Bulatov, Ivan Chuikov, and Oleg Vasiliev)—reacted against some of their predecessors, the dissident modernists of the sixties (*shestidesyatniki*). The conceptualists teased the modernists for their interminable preoccupations with spiritual matters and for their endless searches for answers to eternal questions.⁵³ The dispute concerned each group's view on the question of what constitutes art. While the modernists of the fifties and sixties still viewed art as an emotional outlet for individual expression and as a quest for eternal truth, the younger generation began to question the very nature of art, unable to take its eyes off the collective painted finger of those in power. Moscow Conceptualism "analyzes first of all the very notion of 'art' ...and this is what distinguishes its representatives from the 'unofficial' artists of the fifties and sixties preoccupied with the eternal and the infinite."⁵⁴

There have been many ways of categorizing the modernists of the sixties, and I will return to this problem. A large portion of the modernists resorted to the language of expressionism and abstraction, which may create the impression that their programs were evolving alongside those of their Western colleagues. But this is not entirely the case. *Art informel*, practiced by the Paris School, theorized the new task of art to be

53 One example was the link between Eduard Steinberg (a modernist painter influenced by Russian Orthodox philosophers) and Kabakov, who "approached such 'ultimate questions' with muted irony." See Jackson, "Answers of the experimental group: Ilya Kabakov, Moscow conceptualism, Soviet avant-gardes," 164. The conceptualists used, for instance, the words "*netlenka*" and "*dukhovka*" to refer to their predecessors. Whereas the former word means "imperishable" or "inextinguishable" the latter is formed from the root *dukh* meaning spirit, and in this diminutive form translates as "oven."

54 Bobrinskaia, *Kontseptualizm* [unpaginated].

its ability to reach a degree of formlessness, to go beyond the modernist dichotomy of form and content (neither “form” nor “content”), and to find a language capable of expressing the anxiety of the subject faced with (or thrown into) the emerging contemporary world. Seeking inspiration in the art of outsiders (folk art, the art of children and of the mentally ill) *Art informel* ventured to “unform” pre-established notions. Following the existentialists, its adherents attempted to crack the shell of essences in order to reach the hard kernel of pure existence. On the other side of the Atlantic the triumphantly emerging Abstract Expressionism of the New York School defined the new task of art in terms of inventing idioms and myths of personal liberation, and in doing so, drew extensively on European Surrealism, Existentialism, and psychoanalysis. Artists associated with the New York School used the canvas to record and preserve radical gestures made in the name of freedom, given that the notion of “personal freedom” was becoming a central concept in the political vocabulary of liberalism after World War II.

The unofficial painters of the sixties also saw their art as a form of self-expression, but unlike their Western colleagues many of the Muscovites viewed this form of expression through the prism of a series of religious, theosophical, or metaphysical themes. Although Kabakov refers to a group of Moscow painters from the sixties as a “group of existentialists,”⁵⁵ they must not be confused with the Sartrean atheist existentialists who inspired many artists after World War II. For many painters from the 1960s on, the writings of the Russian nineteenth-century Christian Orthodox philosophers, most of whom were forbidden in the USSR, and the Christian tradition of the Russian icon, were primary influences. Here, and in the philosophical and theological writings of such nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian Orthodox thinkers as Sergei Bulgakov, Nikolai Fedorov, and Pavel Florensky, they sought models of resistance to the regime as well as sources of artistic inspiration. The “paradigm shift” that occurred in the early seventies was gradual, and the new conceptual tendency did not come instantly to replace the older one. Metaphysical and religious interests remained popular among Moscow and Leningrad painters and survived up until the eighties.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Kabakov, *60-e—70-e: zapiski o neofitsial'noi zhizni v Moskve*, 169.

⁵⁶ For a more detailed description of the religious climate that dominated the Moscow unofficial scene, including a presentation of various types of metaphysical consciousness, see *Ibid.*

When the younger generation of artists (the conceptualists) reacted against the metaphysical and mystical enthusiasm of their predecessors, this was also an attempt to introduce into unofficial art a whiff of rationalism, in this way to reconnect culturally to the West, and it is in this regard that the project of Moscow Conceptualism resembles that of the Russian historical avant-garde: they were both working within a Western artistic, aesthetic, and political problematic. They were both predominantly pro-Western, although still with strong links to various Eastern religious and mystical doctrines.⁵⁷ And while the conceptualists' reaction to their predecessors was not as violent as the one that had occurred in the early twentieth century, when such cubo-futurists as Kruchenykh, Matiushin, Khlebnikov, and Malevich declared "Victory over the Sun"—the Sun Deity being an important religious symbol of the pagan Slavic tribes of yore, and thus of the very idea of Russianness—it was nevertheless an important aspect of that paradigm shift that took place in the early seventies, a shift in which a group of younger artists (the first generation of conceptualists) began gradually to diverge from the path set by the underground post-World War II modernists who sought salvation in metaphysical and religious doctrines.

In what sense, then, should one understand the term "romantic," and how does it relate to this shift that occurred on the Moscow unofficial scene? Was the new paradigm romantic in the sense of the adjective "romantic" (i.e., loving, passionate, tender, sentimental) or of the historical term "Romantic," which, as many distinguished critics have remarked, is so difficult to define?⁵⁸ This has never been made clear in the literature on Moscow Conceptualism. Most historians tend to agree that the nineteenth-century Romantic movement was a passionate protest against universality

57 Some critics have also suggested an overall pro-Western orientation for Moscow Conceptualism. See for instance Solomon, *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost*, 104. However, one must not ignore the importance that the mystical or "Eastern" element has had for these two traditions. For the impact of various mystical doctrines on the early-twentieth century poets, writers, and artists see Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997). See also the section on Russian Futurism and Suprematism in Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

58 See for instance Isaiah Berlin's chapter "In Search of a Definition," in *The Roots of Romanticism*, Bollingen series (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

of any kind,⁵⁹ and this might be one reason to call these artists romantic in the historical sense. Against the background of other generations of twentieth century Russian (and Soviet) artists the conceptualists were romantic precisely for their celebration of the particular, as indicated by the expression “private art,” to which many of them subscribed. They opposed the utopian universalism of the Russian historical avant-garde and its belief in universal reason, just as they ignored the ostensibly naïve universalism of Socialist Realism; they also rejected (but respected) the pious and religious universalism of the dissident modernists. In fact it is their enormous respect for and prolonged contact with the latter that made them seem so spiritual and lyrical compared to their Western counterparts. This attitude is also reflected in some of their works, particularly in the documentation and actions of KD, where one still finds the vestiges of religious piety and eastern orthodox Byzantine mysticism, as well as more pronounced attestations of new spiritual preoccupations with such Eastern traditions as Taoism and Buddhism. Thus the term “romantic,” often inserted in the middle of the tag “Moscow Conceptualism,” refers above all to an approach to art that drew primarily on matters of personal salvation and individual self-discovery, as well as to a continuation of the spiritual and mystical preoccupations of these artists but in a slightly different direction—in the direction of “emptiness.”

THE CENTRAL CONCEPT OF “EMPTINESS”

If the phrase “Moscow Conceptualism”—often accompanied by the attribute “romantic” in order to stress the “private” and “spiritual,” or even “mystical” character of this tradition—is the label that serves to identify and distinguish these artists, poets, and writers, then the concept of “emptiness” may be regarded as the name of the method with which they are most often identified. Emptiness is the magic formula, or at least the artistic device that many of these artists and poets have deployed in the construction of their work. If “Moscow Romantic Conceptualism” answers to the “who,” then “emptiness” is its “how,” its *modus operandi*, its main aesthetic and artistic tool.

The function of this tool is comparable, in many respects, to those used by other generations of Russian and Soviet artists. During the early twentieth century, for instance, the Russian Cubo-futurist painters and poets often spoke of *sdvig* (shift, break, displacement), one of their most favored artistic techniques, which contributed to the emergence of such radical forms of artistic experiences as *zaum* poetry and Suprematist painting.⁶⁰ *Pustota* and *sdvig* are both *priemy* (devices, methods, techniques)—to use the language of the Russian formalists—and as such they both have been used in order to revitalize a calcified or automatized artistic experience, in order to breathe new life into tired artistic forms. As concepts, both *pustota* and *sdvig* gathered around them constellations of other concepts, terms, ideas, and formulas; they were the axes around which the discursive fields of these traditions evolved. Each of these words in turn shoulders the overall program of these two generations of artists and poets. Whereas *sdvig* expresses the historical avant-gardist radical negation—the achievement of what Malevich would have called “the zero degree of form”—allowing for a “clean” break into modernity, “emptiness” conveys a similar radical cancellation and negation but only in order to sublimate (that is, to both posit and negate) the modernists’ achievements, which it does in postmodernist fashion by reinstating and celebrating some of its principles and by canceling and nullifying others.

The relevance of the term “emptiness” for the Moscow Conceptualism is readily apparent in a series of subordinate concepts that use the word “empty” or refer to such a state. The *Dictionary* lists such concepts as: “empty” (*pustoe*), “emptiness” (*pustota*), “empty action” (*pustoe deistvie*), “empty canon” (*pustotnyi kanon*), “empty photographs” (*pustye fotografii*), “hidden emptiness” (*spreatannaia pustota*), “empty eternity” (*pustaia vechnost’*), “empty villa” (*pustaia dacha*), “the unknown” (*neizvestnoe*), “the unseen” (*nezametnoe*), “the unrecorded” (*nezapisanost’*), “named emptiness” (*poimenovannaia pustota*), and the Sanskrit variant of *shunyata*

60 The most complete elaboration of the notion of *sdvig* and *sdvigology* was made by the poet Alexei Kruchenykh in A. Kruchenykh, *Kukish proshliakam: faktura slova, sdvigologiya russkogo stikha, apokalipsis v russkoi literature* (Moscow: Gileia, 1992). See also Markov, *Russian Futurism; A History*, Kazimir Severinovich Malevich and Dmitrii Vladimirovich Sarianov, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* (Moscow: Gileia, 1995). On the relation between “sdvig,” *zaum* poetry, and Malevich’s Suprematism see Octavian Eșanu, Malevich’s “passage” to Suprematism: [a painterly sdvigology or a poetic passageology] 2005 [unpublished].

(or *sunyata*) used in reference to Buddhist formulations of emptiness. The term “empty canon” refers to the writings produced by the members of the Medical Hermeneutics group, as well as to the major canonical texts of Moscow Conceptualism. Looking through the main texts of Moscow Conceptualism (through their “empty canon”), one cannot fail to notice that the concept of “emptiness” has received special attention and treatment.

Since some of these terms are discussed in more detail in the following chapters, my main task in this introduction is to construct a certain genealogy of the term “emptiness” by tracing some of its paths through other artistic traditions. Moscow conceptualists, for example, have regarded themselves as descendants of the historical avant-garde, and as such they have elaborated their aesthetic discourse under the auspices of negation, understood in terms of resistance to society and the refutation of established social norms. Emptiness would then be the Moscow conceptualists’ own form of negation, created through a series of dialogues with both local and foreign cultural traditions. Of all the sources that may have contributed to the emergence of the conceptualist aesthetics of emptiness I will look most closely at three: the response of the conceptualists to the radical political aesthetics and to the heritage of the historical Russian avant-garde; the reformulation of some postulates of the religious and metaphysical aesthetics inherited from previous generations of modernists of the fifties and sixties, carried on by the first generation of conceptualists, in particular by Kabakov; and the impact on the second generation of conceptualists of various Eastern spiritual practices—or, rather, of those Western artists, writers, and musicians whose work incorporated various aspects of Zen Buddhism.

The concept of emptiness can easily be traced back through previous generations of Russian art. But to which one? When critics touch upon the “whiteness” or the “emptiness” present in the works of some conceptualists, they instantly refer to the historical avant-garde as if to scale the former to the latter and to ensure a continuation of the Russian cultural tradition. Kabakov’s series of empty or white works from the seventies have been often interpreted as “rethinking the tradition of Malevich,” whereas the white fields where KD’s actions took place were seen as “Malevich’s whiteness, re-interpreted by KD in terms of the snowy fields at the outskirts of Moscow.”⁶¹ But why is it that critics must so often use the historical

61 See for instance the dialogue “Emptiness” in Kabakov et al., *Dialogi: 1990–1994*, 99–100.

avant-garde—and, above all, Malevich—as a historical marker to discuss the Moscow conceptualists' central notion of "emptiness"? A genealogy of "emptiness" in Russian/Soviet culture would have to take into account not only Malevich and Rodchenko's monochromes, for example, but also earlier notions of emptying the poetic image; for instance, as in Vasilisk Gnedov's 1913 *Poem of the End*.⁶² In the following paragraphs I argue that one should distinguish between two forms of artistic negation, between the "nothingness" of the early-twentieth century historical avant-garde and the conceptualists' "emptiness."

In the case of Moscow Conceptualism, a more immediate and direct impact on their notion of emptiness exists in the works of the modernist painters of the fifties and sixties. The conceptualists came in direct contact with many of these artists, who attributed special importance to the notions of whiteness and emptiness. Just as the attribute "romantic," as I have suggested, was precipitated from the modernists' preoccupations with spiritualism and metaphysical idealism, "emptiness" can also be better understood through the work and beliefs of the underground artists of the sixties.

In his memoirs, Kabakov offers a detailed account of the Moscow unofficial scene, individually describing many members of these circles, as well as grouping and categorizing them according to their age, generation, shared worldviews, and their forms of artistic, social, and political engagement.⁶³ In the text "The Air Over Moscow" (*Vozdukh nad Moskvoi*), he portrays in greater detail that unofficial intellectual atmosphere which Groys describes in *A-Ya* as a lyrical and romantic blend opposed to the dryness of officialdom. Kabakov reflects repeatedly upon those painters who left a strong impression on him, and (one should add) through him on the later generations of Moscow conceptualists. It is in his description of the so-called "spiritual painters" Eduard Steinberg and Mikhail Shvartsman, and of the way in which these artists perceived themselves and their art, that one can recognize some features of the conceptualists'

62 The futurist poet Vasilisk Gnedov published his scandalous collection of fifteen poems under the title *Smert' iskusstvu* (Death to Art) in 1913. The last and fifteenth poem, "*Poema kontsa*" (Poem of the End), was the title of a blank white page. See Vasilisk Gnedov and Dmitrii Vladimirovich Kuzmin, *Smert' iskusstvu: piatnadsat' (15) poem* (Moscow: Agro-Risk, 1996).

63 Kabakov, *60-e—70-e: zapiski o neofitsial'noi zhizni v Moskve*.

"emptiness." These were artists who dedicated themselves, from the fifties on, to religious and spiritual pursuits; painters who would have been deeply offended if told that they made good pictures, for they regarded themselves not as mere painters of pictures but as prophets and priests who offered an "opening into a new century" and "new spiritual transformations."⁶⁴ In addition to the persistent use of Christian symbolism—including the cross, the fish, and the bird—their works betrayed overwhelming preoccupations with such painterly issues as light, space, and whiteness. But such preoccupations are not to be understood through the prism of mere physical phenomena; for instance, light as a natural agent that stimulates sights and makes things visible. They regarded these concepts from a broader metaphysical perspective, and they used them within a philosophical and even theological context, speaking not just about light but about the "metaphysics of light." One should remember that "light" can mean "Taboric Light," "Blessed Light," "Gracious Light," "Good Light," or "Eternal Light." Their "whiteness" was also metaphysical, for it meant not only negation, but also a transcendental emptiness, a space the beyond of which is unknown to those of this world. They discussed the notions of whiteness and space using a predominantly religious vocabulary; they would never say "painting something white" but rather "becoming white" (*stanovlenie belym*) or "journeying to the white" (*put' k belomu*).⁶⁵

Their attempts to find an adequate pictorial representation of a transcendental space was an inspiration to many of those who later became known as the first generation of conceptualists; especially to those whose work, like that of Erik Bulatov and Oleg Vasiliev, focused on the problematic of space, particularly of the Soviet ideological space. The prolonged contact of the latter with their metaphysically and mystically minded predecessors largely accounts for their rich and elaborate interpretations of space, whiteness, and emptiness. For Kabakov, who has been one of its main practitioners and theoreticians, "emptiness" is part of the triad "white, Empty, and light" (*beloe, Pustoe i svet*).⁶⁶ The theme of "emptiness" was present in some of the Kabakov's early white

⁶⁴ Kabakov refers here to such artists as Mikhail Shvartsman and Ülo Sooster.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 66–68.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 96.

paintings and especially the album series *Ten Characters* (1972–75).⁶⁷ “Each album narrates the story of one lonely human being who dies in the end; Kabakov registers this act of death by means of several white pages, which complete each portfolio.”⁶⁸ But it is not only in the whiteness of the page that Kabakov registers death or suggests emptiness. He explains that the notion of “emptiness” is more tightly related to his album series than one may think, and that it is the very medium (or genre) of the album that is somehow suggestive of “emptiness.” He provides the following example:

Now, let’s remember a familiar situation, when you come into somebody’s house and the hostess, not knowing how to keep you entertained, starts to show you a very thick family album. ‘This is the aunt, this is the door, these are my sister’s acquaintances from school, etc.’ You know neither these acquaintances nor the hostess’s sister. The album is paged through and through until the moment when aunts, uncles, children, grannies, grandpas, children, military men, cousins, all mix up into one giant muddy stain. You are horrified and despairing when you think of the immense boredom that awaits you in the next fifty pages that you will have to look through, and not too fast, for you don’t want to offend the hostess who has been carried away by memories.⁶⁹

That “muddy stain” made up of unknown aunts, uncles, grannies, and cousins is Kabakov’s notion of emptiness and its relation to the genre of the album. In an earlier text written in the seventies, Kabakov states that “the essence of the album consists in the turning over of its pages.”⁷⁰ It is not what is printed or shown on the surface of those pages, but the very repetitive gesture of paging through: page after page, page after page—it is then that the emptiness of the “muddy stain” and of the album will emerge. The paging through is thus not an everyday (*bytovoe*) action, as it may seem at first glance, but an artistic (*khudozhestvennoe*) gesture.

67 “Kabakov has created a total of 50 albums, the first ten of which can be considered the most significant, and which were produced by the artist in the early 70s under the collective title *Ten Characters*.” Boris Groys, “The Artist as Narrator,” in *Ilya Kabakov Viisi Albumia, Fem Alumer, Five Albums, Piat’ Al’bomov*, ed. Ilya Kabakov (Helsinki: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1994). viii.

68 Tupitsyn, *Margins of Soviet Art: Socialist Realism to the Present*, 40.

69 Kabakov, *60-e—70-e: zapiski o neofitsial’noi zhizni v Moskve*, 104.

70 Dyogot and Zakharov, *Moskovskii kontseptualizm*, 357–59.

Kabakov specifies that for this emptiness to emerge, the album, the book (or whatever is paged though) must be very thick, and in fact when Kabakov defined emptiness as a major theme in Russian conceptualism, he made a similar reference to quantity. He described the writing styles of Dostoevsky and Gogol, emphasizing that emptiness emerges only when abundance or even a surplus of representation exists; it is then that the veil of emptiness falls in between the reader/spectator and the represented object.

It is through Kabakov's particular version of emptiness that one can trace the main tools and devices of some members of the later generations of the Moscow conceptualists. For instance, KD's best-known device, called "empty action" (*pustoe deistvie*)—which refers to a set of apparently futile actions and gestures investigated for their marginal aesthetic value—is one of them. Kabakov's metaphor of leafing through the family album of a stranger is a perfect example of an empty action. KD would later specify that one does not recognize it as such at the time it is performed; it can only be detected later by looking at the documentation material (e.g., records, photographs, and texts). KD employed the term "empty photographs" from its second phase (1980–83) onward. The term "empty photographs" (*pustye fotografii*), part of the so-called "factographical discourse," designates photographs in which nothing (or almost nothing) is shown—a "deliberate emptiness." Later, the third generation of Moscow conceptualists would also coin such terms as "book after book" (*kniga za knigoi*).⁷¹ This term, which designates one of the main principles employed by the members of the Medical Hermeneutics group, refers to the fact that blocks of information (e.g., texts or artworks) should be divided internally by empty silent intervals, like the portfolios in Kabakov's album series that climaxed in "dead" white empty pages. Just below the surface all of these terms carry the meaning of Kabakov's emptiness, and through the latter one can descend even deeper and glimpse the metaphysical and religious emptiness of the dissident modernists and of the avant-gardists.

But the Moscow conceptualists' aesthetics of emptiness did not form only as a result of a direct dialogue with the modernists. There is another significant source of inspiration for the category of "emptiness," a source that came from abroad, though it followed a twisted and convoluted route: the influence of Eastern spiritual practices—in particular, that of Buddhism.

71 For a more extended definition of some of these terms see the main section of the *Dictionary* in the Appendix.

This significant supplement to the Muscovites' emptiness did not arrive, as one would expect, from the East, but from the West. It emerged as a theme that dealt with Western post-World War II contemporary culture and its infatuation with Zen Buddhism. The members of the KD group in particular, who brought into their aesthetics and artistic practice some Buddhist postulates and principles, have contributed to this aspect of conceptualist emptiness.

Buddhism is not foreign to Russia. In fact, Russia is the only European country where this religion has been practiced for centuries. In the large family of nationalities of the Russian Federation there are several ethnic groups that have long practiced a Mahayana version of Buddhism, with some, like the Kalmyks, inhabiting the southeastern part of the East European or the Russian Plain. Neither intensive Christianization by Russian Orthodox missionaries in the nineteenth century nor the extreme measures undertaken by the Soviet authorities with regard to the local Buddhist communities, the lamas, and their monastic institutions brought about the assimilation or disappearance of this religion's adherents. A reverse process has even taken place, and some studies have suggested a certain "Buddhisation" of Russia.⁷² Buddhist ideas were already popular in Russia among nineteenth-century writers and thinkers, who, like Leo Tolstoy, Nikolai Gogol, and Vladimir Solovyov, often turned to this spiritual practice in search for answers amid their perennial concern for Russian identity and Russia's place in the world. The religious philosopher Solovyov, for instance, deployed the Middle Way in order to theorize a special "third way" for Russia and its continual concern with its geopolitical position at the crossroads of West and East.⁷³

After World War II, following the process of political liberalization that began in the second half of the fifties, the Soviet authorities adopted a more tolerant policy toward religions. By the mid-1960s Buddhist communities began to appear in Moscow, Leningrad, Tartu, and other Soviet cities.⁷⁴ The development of unofficial artistic communities in the major cities of the USSR went in parallel with the partial rehabilitation of religions and of religious freedoms. Religious, spiritual, and even mystical ideas have always played an important role among Russian cultural elites; I have

72 On the cultural impact of Russian *Buddhism* see K. A. Nadneeva, *Buddism v kontexte kul'tury Rossii* (Moscow: Novyi xronograph, 2005).

73 Ibid., 18.

74 Ibid., 15.

already mentioned the role that some Christian Orthodox thinkers have played for the first unofficial artists—the modernists of the fifties and sixties. With the emergence of Moscow Conceptualism one may speak not only of a certain degree of secularization of the unofficial artistic discourse, especially compared to their predecessors, but also of new preoccupations with non-Christian spiritual and religious practices, and above all with Buddhism. However, for the second generation of conceptualists, in particular for the members of KD, who added distinct Buddhist ingredients to the Muscovites' aesthetics of emptiness, the influences did not come directly from the local Tibetan Buddhist communities of the Kalmyks, the Buryats, or the Tuvans, nor from India, China, or Japan, but from the West, particularly from the United States.

A channel of communication in this respect was opened when a series of publications in the USSR began to present various aspects of contemporary Western culture. One of these in particular had a great impact on KD's early members: *Eastern Culture in the Contemporary Western World* (1977), by Evgenia Zavadskaia, quickly became popular among the younger generation of unofficial artists, poets, and writers.⁷⁵ The book was based on an earlier publication by the same author, entitled *East in the West* (1970),⁷⁶ an investigation into the aesthetic impact of Buddhism on Western culture. It examined in particular the philosophical and aesthetic influence of Ch'an, rather than that of Zen—the branch of Mahayana Buddhism that had become the most popular in the West.⁷⁷ The emphasis on the Chinese rather than on the Japanese tradition may have been conditioned by the fact that China, unlike Japan, was also a communist country, and for a short period of time an ally of the USSR.

The book may be regarded as part of a special category of Soviet literature that began to appear during the last decades of the USSR. These were publications that on the surface still denounced various aspects of Western bourgeois culture, but the criticism was less dogmatic, and they were well-enough informed as to constitute a valuable source of information

75 E. V. Zavadskaia, *Kul'tura Vostoka v sovremennom zapadnom mire* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977). Artists mention the significance of this book and its impact on KD in Solomon, *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost*. 85–86.

76 E. V. Zavadskaia, *Vostok na Zapade* (Moscow, 1970).

77 Ch'an is the Chinese and Zen is the Japanese transcription of the Sanskrit term *dhyana*, meaning meditation or concentration. In a footnote the author explains that the two are not identical. Zavadskaia, *Kul'tura Vostoka v sovremennom zapadnom mire*, n 1.

on this subject—information that otherwise would have been forbidden. The author explains the interest of Western artists and writers in Ch'an Buddhism in terms of a search for solutions to the perennial problems and contradictions of capitalist society; namely, the alienation of the individual, the standardization of thinking, social apathy, and so forth. Zavadskaia suggests that Ch'an was the spiritual tradition that was consistent in many regards with the existential and phenomenological postulates popular in those days within Western intellectual circles, and also that this spiritual practice was seen by many representatives of Western culture as part of an alternative lifestyle.⁷⁸ The book also introduced the Soviet reader to the main principles and tenets of Ch'an Buddhism, examining various historical traditions and schools, and pointing to those key figures who popularized this tradition in the West. In separate chapters the author proceeds to examine the relation of Ch'an to Western culture, discussing a list of philosophers, writers, artists, and musicians.

This book's importance for the conceptualists is revealed in a series of words that would later resurface in the vocabulary of KD. For example, Monastyrsky's concept "Teddy Syndrome" was used extensively in the terminology of KD to refer to the various ways in which the spectator reacts to the group's actions. The *Dictionary* defines it as a "syndrome of immediate or instant understanding"⁷⁹ meaning that someone participating in KD's activities is capable of "understanding," or of providing an instant interpretation of one of their actions. The term is derived from J. D. Salinger's short story *Teddy*, which Zavadskaia discusses at length, presenting it as a perfect example of the influence of Zen and Ch'an Buddhism on many Western writers. Salinger's character Teddy is the extraordinary American boy who shares a perception of the world similar to that advocated by Ch'an Buddhists. The rejection of a strictly rational view of the world, as well as the refusal to divide the world according to a hierarchy of values, is reflected in Teddy's innocent, childlike and yet serious conduct. Monastyrsky's "immediate or instant understanding" is set in contrast to "Syndrome Guguta" (*Guguta Sindrom*), which the *Dictionary* defines as "complete lack of understanding."⁸⁰ These concepts

78 Ibid., 8.

79 Monastyrsky, *Slovar' terminov moskovskoi kontseptual'noi shkoly*, 84 (see also the Appendix).

80 Ibid., 36.

may be also interpreted as allusions to the two main schools of Ch'an Buddhism (the Southern and the Northern), a split that occurred due to certain divergences regarding the path to enlightenment—the method of “instant enlightenment” advocated by the Southerners versus the “gradual enlightenment” promoted by the Northerners.

A more direct impact on KD's aesthetics of emptiness appears in Zavadskaia's last chapter, dedicated to music. Here the author examines the influence of Ch'an aesthetics on contemporary Western music, bringing into discussion the art of John Cage and his aesthetics of silence. Cage would become one of the greatest foreign influences on KD, and his central concept of silence may be regarded as the aural equivalent and one of the significant precursors of KD's “emptiness.” The author compares Cage's musical method to that of a Ch'an painter, who sometimes added only a few brushstrokes in order to emphasize the beauty and importance of the empty surface of the canvas or paper.⁸¹ The value of the paper's emptiness is relative to the brushstrokes, an important detail to which I return below. Still within the context of Ch'an Buddhism, Zavadskaia also introduces Alan Kaprow's idea of “happening,” insisting that “it is the art of happening that brings to the fore the main facets of Ch'an aesthetics, which were only partially revealed in literature, music, and painting.” She quotes what Kaprow considers to be the “essence of happening”; namely, the “absence of any kind of concrete association” (151).

The main ideas of Zavadskaia's book—which has been very influential for KD and other conceptualists during their early phases—is that unlike Western philosophy, which has traditionally problematized an unbridgeable gap between the subject and the object, the Ch'an tradition of thought encourages the search for a space in which these two opposites meet.

Object is object for the subject
 Subject is subject for the object
 You must know that these two
 Persist in a state of absolute emptiness.
 In absolute emptiness these two are undividable...⁸²

81 Zavadskaia, *Kul'tura Vostoka v sovremennom zapadnom mire*, 148.

82 Quoted in *Ibid.*, 19.

Ch'an "emptiness" may be understood in terms of a state that persists somewhere in the middle of two irreconcilable opposites, in that still and empty center from which opposites can be observed and reconciled, and from which one observes with complete detachment the "as-suchness" of things. Through this empty center, or placeless place—a kind of u-topos—lies the path to enlightenment and to Buddha nature. KD's ten volumes of the *Journeys* may be regarded as an account of this search for the empty still center, for that placeless place, which over more than three decades its members have struggled to observe and to describe. "Emptiness is espoused as a condition of total receptivity"⁸³ may be regarded as the motto of KD aesthetics, especially in the early phases, when the group's journeys outside the city resembled invitations to participate in collective meditations. Spectators were invited to participate in various actions and encouraged to observe and report with phenomenological precision on whatever took place in front of them: states of mind, thoughts, illusions, fears, desires, or other feelings and sensations. Learning to resolve various oppositions—for instance, that between the artist and the spectator, or between art and nonart—the group has cultivated and incorporated into its aesthetics such states as mindfulness, preparedness, alert receptivity, and acceptance of everything that comes into the field of perception. These practices have been its main addition to the Moscow conceptualists' concept of "emptiness."

The Moscow conceptualists' aesthetic category of emptiness must be differentiated with regard to which wing or generation of Moscow conceptualists employs it. Kabakov's variant of emptiness was inspired primarily by his direct contact with his modernist predecessors' preoccupations with metaphysical, transcendental, and religious whiteness and Light, as well as by his reflections on the "empty" reality of Soviet everyday life and persistent feelings of uselessness, groundlessness, and senselessness. Unlike Kabakov, KD aspires to an aesthetic of emptiness that goes beyond direct or concrete references to or associations with aspects of everyday life. In their writings the members of KD often expressed irritation with those spectators who found too simple and direct references and associations between their actions, which were also often called "happenings," and the social or the political context. KD's variant of emptiness also has a more distinct Buddhist flavor than Kabakov's does.

83 Ray Grigg, *The Tao of Zen*, 1st ed. (Boston: C.E. Tuttle Co., 1994), 184.

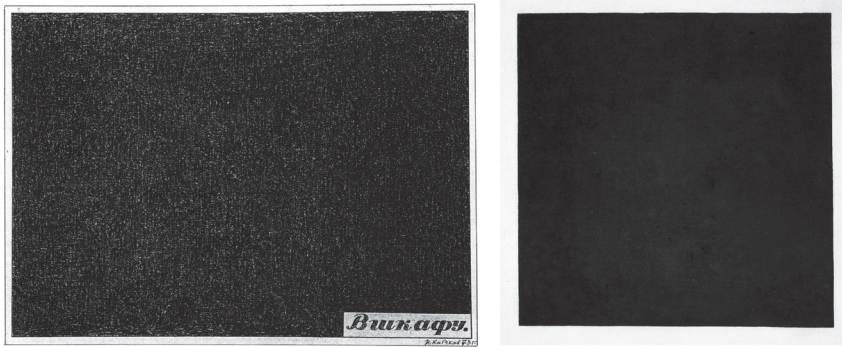


FIGURE 4: ILYA KABAKOV, *IN THE CLOSET* (1973) AND KASIMIR MALEVICH, *BLACK SQUARE* (CA. 1923)

But the “emptiness” of Moscow Conceptualism must be also distinguished from other forms of negation developed by previous generations of Russian/Soviet artists. Zen and Ch’an Buddhism differentiate between nothingness and emptiness, nothingness being regarded as an extension of emptiness. Nothingness is the condition of total negation, “the no-concept of no-concept... Whereas emptiness is relative, nothingness is absolute, a notion that cannot be conceived and does not have a conceivable counterpart.”⁸⁴ With the notion of emptiness one can juxtapose the concept of fullness, whereas nothingness can only be contrasted with an abstract and ungraspable notion of everything or of the infinite. “Nothingness,” to turn to the words of Sartre, “haunts being”—that is, in order to discuss the notion of nothingness, being itself must be set as its ground.⁸⁵ Without being, one cannot speak of nothingness.

An implicit distinction between emptiness and nothingness becomes evident when one compares how various forms of artistic negation have been used by Soviet/Russian artists of different generations. Two artworks that have been considered paradigmatic for the two generations of Russian/Soviet artists aptly illustrate this difference: Malevich’s *Black Square* (ca. 1923), regarded as a symbol of the historical avant-garde, and one page from Kabakov’s album series, a cycle of works that had a great impact on the Moscow conceptualists (FIGURE 4).

84 Ibid., 241.

85 On the concept of nothingness see the chapter “The Problem of Nothingness” in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1966).

It is not coincidental that since its earliest reception Malevich's *Black Square* has garnered such epithets as: "nothing," "void," "abyss," "zero degree of form," and "infinity."⁸⁶ With this work the artist makes an objective claim not only as to the condition of painting in the early twentieth century, but also as to the state of art in general. Malevich's contemporaries regarded *Black Square* as an abrupt end to the institution of art as it had evolved until then in bourgeois society; they saw this work as a descent into absolute nothingness, which is the ultimate ground for a new radical act of creation.⁸⁷ Malevich's unconditional nothingness is also suggested on the pictorial level. There are no other elements on the surface that would make this particular form of negation relative to anything. The negation applies to the entire surface of painting, to the whole surface of the canvas, suggesting a total cancellation, or a pulling down of the blinds on the "window into the world," as this genre of fine arts was known in Western culture since Leon Battista Alberti.

In contrast, Kabakov's picture, selected from the first cycle of the album entitled *Sitting-in-the-Closet-Primakov* (1974), would be more appropriately described as empty. The fact that this work convey emptiness rather than nothingness is suggested by a black surface which is not absolute but relative with regard to other pictorial elements that appear on the surface of paper, in this case the phrase "In the closet" (*v shkafu*) and the artist's signature. As in Ch'an painting, in which the emptiness of the white page or canvas is emphasized by the presence of a few brushstrokes, this picture is empty due to the presence of a few textual elements.

86 For an example of words used to describe this work see for instance Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, 288.

87 In a lecture delivered in Berlin in 1922, El Lissitzky spoke about the importance of this painting in following terms: "[...] Malevich exhibited a black square painted on a white canvas. Here a form was displayed which was opposed to everything that was understood by 'pictures' or 'painting' or 'art.' Its creator wanted to reduce all forms, all painting, to zero. For us, however, this zero was the turning point. When we have a series of numbers coming from infinity . . . 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0 . . . it comes right down to the 0, then, begins the ascending line 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 . . . These lines are ascending, but already from the other side of the picture. It has been said that the centuries have brought painting right up to the square, so that here they can find their way down. We are saying that if on the one side the stone of the square has blocked the narrowing canal of painting, then on the other side it becomes the foundation-stone for the new spatial construction of reality." Quoted in W. Sherwin Simmons, *Kasimir Malevich's Black Square and the Genesis of Suprematism 1907–1915* (New York: Garland Pub., 1981), 3.

Unlike Malevich's claim to universality, which is consistent with what has been described as "the utopian program of the historical avant-garde," Kabakov's statement is particular and subjective, as the very notion of "album" suggests. The album (the personal photographic account of one's life) perfectly epitomizes the key principles of Moscow Conceptualism, expressing their primary aesthetic concerns with individual freedom. Kabakov's picture is an illustration—a genre of art at the crossroads of painting and literature—from the subjective viewpoint of one who sits in the darkness of the closet; it is a glimpse into one of his characters' frightened souls. And what his character Primakov sees from his dark closet is, in fact, a horrifying glimpse of "the famous square of Malevich—that symbol of the liberation of art from narrativity and ordinariness."⁸⁸

The relativity of emptiness is most conspicuous in Kabakov's 1973 cycle *Decorator Maligin*. In this series, emptiness is being "produced" by the characters that passively observe it from the margins and corners of the blank page—it is relative to these characters that project it from its edge. One may also say that KD deployed the tactics of "projecting" emptiness from the margins in its actions. Both artists and spectators would gather and remain at the edge of the empty Kievogorskoe Field in order both to observe and to participate in the group's laconic actions, which sometimes were so imperceptible that they tended to vanish into the white emptiness of the snowy winter field.

On the Moscow conceptualists' discursive field, *pustota* (emptiness) is also located right at the center, from which it organizes this conceptual space centripetally. It is KD's main aesthetic strategy, and as such it must be distinguished from other forms of negation employed by those precursors with whom the conceptualists were in dialogue: it must not be confounded with the radical and utopian "nothingness" of the historical avant-garde that imagined the possibility of an absolute negation of the established social and aesthetic order, nor with the pious "whiteness" and "Light" of the modernists of the fifties and sixties, who, for the most part, still believed in a socialism with a human face that they hoped to transcend or reform with a dose of religious piety. The wing of conceptual artists to which KD belongs came on the scene when doubt in absolute truth, in universals—in grand, master, or metanarratives—finally reached the outskirts of Moscow.

PART II

Transition: From KD to [KD]

Chapter 3

KD'S JOURNEYS BEFORE 1989

It was during the Soviet period that the KD group gradually emerged with its own mythology, methodology, and terminology. From 1976 to 1989 its members sought unique ways to investigate the nature of art—this search for method comprising the group's main self-professed artistic program and affecting all aspects of its artistic and aesthetic practice. This Soviet or "before" period is the time in which the group created the model called "KD"—a model that, in spite of all changes since, has guided its aesthetic principles for almost three decades.

Before proceeding to discuss the emergence of this model I must define the position from which I will write—a key step in approaching Moscow Conceptualism and especially KD. For years the members of KD arranged that part of the world with which they interacted into an elaborate and hermetic system, thus requiring the outsider to find a niche in this system that would allow him or her to relate to their work. To again quote Ekaterina Dyogot: "A person outside of Moscow Conceptualism is regarded as *a priori* incompetent (although he is given a chance to prove the opposite.)"¹ Kabakov has the same hermeticism in mind when he writes: "I cannot frankly imagine what is it for an outsider to read Monastyrsky's texts in the *Journeys Outside the City*."² Indeed, KD's writings, particularly the texts written by Monastyrsky, are very difficult to follow. As the art critic Viktor Tupitsyn writes: "Andrei is a typical artist-theoretician, in the sense that he is not a theoretician of culture but of himself, of his own symbolic place that he constitutes by means of the texts."³ In order to write about KD one has literally to bushwhack through a thicket of definitions and terms, rules and regulations, concepts and techniques that form a dense net of mythemes in KD's mythology—one that holds only within the well-protected

1 Dyogot and Zakharov, *Moskovskii kontseptualizm*, 11.

2 Kabakov, *Noma ili Moskovskii kontseptual'nyi krug: installiatsiia*, 36.

3 V. Tupitsyn in v. 8th of Monastyrsky, "Poezdki za gorod: 6–10 vols." [unpaginated].

and insufficiently explored world of Moscow Conceptualism. Some of these terms were invented by the artists precisely in order to describe their relations with those with whom the group collaborated during those secretive years, as well as in order to tell apart those who did not belong to their closed circle. KD's lexicon initially distinguished two kinds of outsiders or spectators: the "spectator-participant" (*zritel'-uchastnik*)—also called, especially in the mid-seventies, "the circle of people with interests at stake"—and the "anonymous spectator" (*anonimnyi-zritel'*).⁴ The "spectator-participant" is a special category of the public that includes artists, writers, critics, and poets, most of whom were part of the larger circle of Moscow Conceptualism. This category of participants received personal invitations to attend each of KD's actions, and they were the ones who were personally asked to write reports and engage in interpretation of the attended actions. The second and far less restrictive category was that of the "anonymous-spectator." If one happened to accidentally come across one of KD's actions or objects, or especially one of its works from the series *Banners*, remaining for a while in a state of puzzlement as to what these objects might mean, then one would automatically become an "anonymous-spectator" of KD.⁵ Theoretically every Soviet citizen could have become part of this category. These two categories, "spectator-participant" and "anonymous-spectator," or "friends" and "everybody else," were the two main categories that existed before 1989.

4 The *Dictionary* does not contain the category "spectator-participant" but only that of "anonymous spectator." In the *Journeys*, however, from the very first volume Monastyrsky mentions the category "spectator-participant" (*zritel'-uchastnik*). Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 20. For complete definitions of some of these terms see also the Appendix.

5 In the first volume Nikita Alexeev described what might have happened when someone came accidentally across one of KD's *Banners*. It was from this hypothetical description that the term "anonymous spectator" emerged: "When the passerby notices a *Banner*, hanging far away over the river, he will start wondering why it hangs there, being absolutely sure that the text is just another Soviet propaganda slogan. But when he approaches the site, he will be surprised to read: I DO NOT COMPLAIN ABOUT ANYTHING AND I DO LIKE EVERYTHING, DESPITE THE FACT THAT I HAVE NEVER BEEN HERE BEFORE AND I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THESE PLACES. Wondering about the written content, the passerby will find himself in an empty psychological space." Nikita Alexeev in *ibid.*, 94.

In the manuscripts of the post-1989 unpublished *Journeys*, one encounters another category of spectator sometimes called the “free spectator,” the “invisible spectator,” or the “spectator outsider.”⁶ I will discuss this shift toward a new kind of spectator in the last chapter of Part II, but for now, I mention the category of the “spectator outsider” in order to indicate the position from which I write. It must be stressed that this position is that of the most disadvantaged category of spectator, for it includes all those who (like me) encounter the art of the group neither through personal invitations like the “spectator-participant,” nor accidentally like the “anonymous spectator,” but through books, catalogues, photographs, and other sources of documentation. From this position—the only one left to those who are not part of Moscow Conceptualism but who are still interested in this group—I translate, describe, and analyze the art and aesthetics of KD as documented in the ten volumes of the *Journeys*. Over the years KD has asked its spectator-participants to write reports and describe their impressions and thoughts after attending its actions. This book, and this chapter in particular, may in some ways be regarded as a participant-report submitted by an outsider-spectator upon encountering the work of KD.

This chapter is divided into four sections, and each section examines a phase in KD's Soviet history, presenting those changes and alterations that I found critical for understanding what constitutes the aesthetic model of KD. In my discussion of each phase, I rely primarily on the material available in the five published volumes of KD's *Journeys* and in the *Dictionary*. In order to give the reader a sense of what a “typical” action of KD looks like, I examine, in section one, two, and three of this chapter, three actions that took place in the first (1976–80), second (1980–83), and third (1983–85) phases, introducing and translating some of the main concepts from KD's lexicography, explaining their relevance in each particular phase. For these sections I draw mainly on the texts of two persons whom one may call the “main artist-organizer” and the “main spectator-participant.” The main artist is Andrei Monastyrsky, who over the years has asserted himself as the leader of this group, authored and organized most of KD's actions, wrote most of KD's texts, and invented most of the group's vocabulary. The main spectator for the before-*Journeys* is Ilya Kabakov, who was also the

6 Foreword to Volume Seven in Monastyrsky, “Poezdki za gorod: 6–10 vols” [unpaginated].

most influential person for the group, and who for an entire decade (1976–1986) attended and wrote about many of KD's actions.⁷ The chapter's last section discusses the development of the group during the fourth and the fifth phases, which overlapped in time with a series of radical social and political transformations in which the USSR was caught up in the second half of the eighties.

VOLUME I (PHASE 1976–80): *APPEARANCE*

The material in the first volume of the *Journeys* is arranged in the following order: Acknowledgment, Foreword, Descriptive Texts, Participant Reports, and Commentaries. With some exceptions, this is the order that has been kept in all the subsequent volumes of KD's *Journeys*. In the short "Acknowledgement" (*Ot avtorov*), the artists thank all those who helped them organize and photograph their actions, and list those who joined the group during some phase or another. Next is the "Foreword" (*Predislovie*), which is the main theoretical text of each volume. Here, Monastyrsky summarizes the general direction of the group during each phase, pointing to the main changes, general direction, and new terms and concepts developed in the course of a given phase. The next section, called "Descriptive Texts" (*Opisatel'nye texty*), includes the descriptions of all the actions that were organized during each phase. Each description contains the action's plot and location, the names of the authors (ordered according to their contribution to the action), and the documentation that accompanied it. The following section, called "Participants' Reports" (*Rasskazy uchastnikov*), presents the reader with the spectator-participants' writings after their participation in one of the group's actions. Finally, each volume concludes with a section called "Commentaries" (*Kommentarii*), where the critical interpretations of the artists' actions and the spectators' reactions are compiled.

In what follows, I provide two descriptions of KD's first action, *Appearance*: one is the original report, which I translate from the first volume of the *Journeys*, and the second is my description of this action

⁷ Kabakov is only second (after Backstein) in the number of attended actions in the before-1989 period (1976–89). Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 781.

using concepts from the vocabulary of KD. I deliberately retell the action using these concepts, so that I have the opportunity to define and explain some of KD's most important terms. It must be stressed that the first phase was the group's "time of innocence," a time when the artists were less concerned with forming concepts and documenting, reporting, and commenting on their actions than with organizing actions. As the *Dictionary* indicates, almost no specific KD concept emerged during the first phase. Monastyrsky began to assemble the original samizdat version of the *Journeys* only in the eighties, and the book was published in 1998. Therefore, it must be kept in mind that the structure that I have imposed on the material, as well as many of the words and concepts that I use to describe the 1976 action *Appearance*, are belated constructs, many of which did not exist at that time. And yet the history of this art group may thus serve as a good, compressed illustration of one important aspect of the emergence of the historical institution of art: the gradual transformation and even the dissolution of practice into theory, of actions into stories; the emergence of artistic genres and the ongoing perfection of a process in which theoretical and historical concepts are invented in order to be applied retrospectively to the unmediated practices of the past.

Description:

"APPEARANCE" (*POIAVLENIE*)

The spectators received invitations to attend the action "Appearance." Five minutes after the spectators (30 people) gathered on the edge of the field, from the opposite side, from the woods, two participants [organizers] of the action appeared. They crossed the field, approached the spectators, and handed them certificates ("Documentary Confirmation"), attesting to their presence during the action "Appearance."

MOSCOW, IZMAILOVSK FIELD

March 13, 1976

A. Monastyrsky,

L. Rubinstein,

N. Alexeev,

G. Kizevalter⁸

This is the original description of the action *Appearance*, which arose from the intention of inviting a few friends to witness a simple, nonartistic situation: “the appearance before a crowd of friends of two or three familiar people.”⁹ The description includes, as will others, the title, the sequence of events (plot), sometimes the number of spectator-participants, the place of the action, and the names of the artists in the order of their relative involvement in the work (the first listed name always indicating the author followed by those who assisted him or her). Most of the descriptions are written in the dry, informative style of a document, and for the most part they describe what the group calls the plot or the “eventful part”¹⁰ (*sobytiinaia chast’*) of the action. In the following paragraphs I provide my own description of the action *Appearance*, expanding the time-frame to also include the spectators’ journey outside the city to the place of the action. I will modify the description by transforming it into a hypothetical (fictional) action with the same name, in order to introduce some of KD’s most important concepts, placed in square brackets.

The action [*Appearance*] represents a situation where a group of [spectator-participants], known also as [circle of people with interests at stake], follow the [Backstein Function] and [Journey Outside the City]. The group travels to a field, located [out-of-town], in order to undergo a certain spiritual experience. They will experience within their inner [ES (emotional space)] a series of [empty] states such as [prewaiting], [waiting], and [accomplished waiting], as well as various other effects as a result of KD’s [empty actions]. These states are part of a broader category called [undetermined zones] (or [zones of accidental impressions]), and they appear on the [demonstrative semiotic field] and on the [exposition semiotic field] set out by KD’s actions.

For the action *Appearance*, a group of friends was invited to make a trip outside Moscow. After receiving their invitations (or after they were each called or otherwise informed), they met at a train station and prepared to embark on a local train. They were about to [Journey Outside the City].

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 107.

This was a crucial phrase in the vocabulary of the group, and it served them as the title of all (published and unpublished) volumes. Later, during the third phase, they would even use it to refer to a new genre of art. The phrase was suggested in 1980 by Kabakov, whose impact on Monastyrsky and on the work of the group was quite significant.¹¹ The *Dictionary* defines the Journey Outside the City as a “genre of action in which the stress is on the aesthetic importance of various phases of traveling to the place of the action, as well as on various forms of describing it.”¹² Over the years the group’s artists have worked to prove that a journey is for one of its actions what a frame is for a painting. One of KD’s main aesthetic concerns for decades has been the idea that while journeying to see an artwork, one must wait to see what will happen. KD owes this idea of “waiting as a frame” to the poet Vsevolod Nekrasov, who theorized that the sense of waiting for something surrounds or frames that which is about to take place. “In addition,” Monastyrsky observed, “Nekrasov believes that it is very difficult to locate this ‘frame’; where it begins and where it ends.”¹³ In its work KD attempts to deal with this difficult task of establishing when an action begin: does it begin when the guests receive their invitations, when they embark on the train, or on the train?

Once on the train, the group begins to discuss the latest news, which for the most part concerns issues current within its unofficial circles: art news from abroad, an acquaintance in common, studio visits and purchases by Moscow diplomatic personnel, a new commission for a children’s book illustration at work, and so forth. Once the train leaves behind the Moscow highrises, the travelers prepare to disembark at the first signal from the person delegated to lead the group to the field where the artists are preparing the action. This person is performing what KD calls the [Backstein Function] (*Bakshtein funkzia*)—a task that consists of helping to coordinate the movements of the spectators with those of the artists and/or of helping to organize a discussion among the spectators and artists. The term is defined by the *Dictionary* as a “universal operator of actuality within the circle of Moscow conceptualists.”¹⁴ For many years, and particularly during the nineties when the term emerged, it was the Moscow curator, and art critic Joseph Backstein who carried out this function most

11 Ibid., 777.

12 Monastyrsky, *Slovar' terminov moskovskoi kontseptual'noi shkoly*, 69.

13 Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 728.

14 Monastyrsky, *Slovar' terminov moskovskoi kontseptual'noi shkoly*, 28.

often. When the “operator of actuality” in charge of the Backstein Function announces the stop, those in the group get ready to disembark, knowing that they have reached their [out-of-town] destination.

[Out-of-town-ness] (*zagorodnost'*) is another specific KD aesthetic term that Monastyrsky defines as a particular space adjacent to many a big Soviet city. To be “out of town” is to be within a well-defined border region between the “city” and “noncity”; it is a topographic concept Monastyrsky maintains is specific to the Soviet landscape and absent in Western countries.¹⁵ To “out-of-town-ness” belongs the landscape that opens up at the edges of big cities (past suburbia); and although these territories may have all the features of the countryside (e.g., fields and woods), they cannot belong to the country due to their close proximity to Moscow, Leningrad, or another big city. The “out-of-town” is practically a no man’s land, a neutral zone that does not fall under the authority of any law; in the eyes of city officials it is already the countryside, and those in the countryside fear it because it is too close to the city. Although KD also organized many actions in the city over the years, its most important work was done precisely in the fields near Moscow. One of these places, called Kievogorskoe Field (*Kievogorskoe pole*), near the village of Kievy Gorky, was the group’s aesthetic field of maneuver, for it is here that KD organized most of its “out-of-town” actions.

Once detained, the group of [spectator-participants] or [the circle of people with interests at stake] again follows the guide who is in charge of the Backstein Function. It is already mid-March, but the landscape is still covered in a white layer of pristine snow. The spectator-participants make their way toward a grove and when they pass it the group reaches the edge of a large white field. The operator says “Kievogorskoe Field,” nodding toward the empty field as if saying, “it is here that everything will take place.”¹⁶ At the edge of the field the group is invited to take its prearranged place, and begins to wait for the onset of the action. [Waiting] is another important category for KD, as was especially the case during the first phase of its history. It was precisely the act of waiting that transformed KD’s guests into its spectators. For the moment it is worth mentioning that

¹⁵ Not to be confused with “categories of KD.” Ibid., 144.

¹⁶ Although the first action of KD (*Appearance*) took place on the “Izmailovsk Field,” I will use “Kievogorskoe Field,” where most of the actions of KD took place.

KD divides the concept of “waiting” into such phases as “prewaiting” (the time after the guests receive their invitations), “waiting” (now, at the edge of the field), and “accomplished waiting,” which comes (or does not) in the later stages of the action. Monastyrsky introduced the term “theory of waiting” in 1983 and the *Dictionary* explains that he decided to “describe and research various phases of waiting, after he encountered the word “prewaiting” in one of Kabakov’s reports written about an early action of KD.”¹⁷ Such states as “prewaiting,” “waiting,” “accomplished waiting,” “the receiving of the invitation to attend an action,” and the “journey to the place of the action” that the spectator is experiencing form part of another, broader category called [Undetermined Zones] (or [Zones of Accidental Impressions]).

But “waiting” is only the first step in which this company of spectators has been engaged. As the spectators wait to see what will happen next, they “listen,” they “look” fixedly, scanning the empty field and trying to catch the slightest change on its white snowy surface. Suddenly, in the distance, somebody notices two black dots, and communicates this to the rest of the group. Now the entire group watches the two approaching figures. While watching the two dots grow the spectators are also trying to guess who these people are, or into which members of KD the two distant silhouettes will resolve themselves. When the faces of these figures are clearly distinguishable the spectators notice that the artists carry in their hands scraps of white paper. Now the artists come very close to the waiting group and begin handing each of the spectators a piece of paper that reads:

“Appearance”

(Sample of the certificate attesting your presence during the
“Appearance”)

confirmation

that (name) _____

has witnessed the APPEARANCE

that took place on March 13, 1976¹⁸

17 Theory of Waiting (*Teoria ozhidania*)—“description and research of various phases of waiting.” See Monastyrsky, *Slovar’ terminov moskovskoi kontseptual’noi shkoly*, 156.

18 Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 36.

The spectator-participants read the certificates—which is to say, they are now trying to “understand” and to “interpret” the actions of the artists-organizers. “Waiting,” “looking,” “understanding,” “failing to understand,” and “interpreting” the various “strange” actions performed by the artists all relate to another important category in the aesthetics of KD and that of Moscow Conceptualism. The concept of Emptiness (*pustota*) presides over the entire discourse of KD. Kabakov, as noted in Part I, introduced and worked with this concept from the seventies on and managed to pass it on to other conceptualists as well.¹⁹ The states of waiting, looking, listening, and trying to understand that the group of spectator-participants experience on the edge of Kievogorskoe Field are often described as “empty.” When they begin to discuss the action with the organizers, they understand that the method of KD is different in many respects from that of other artists and groups.

Many of KD’s spectators had seen, for instance, the performances of the group Nest (*Gnezdo*), which appeared one year prior to the formation of KD (1975). The three members of Nest (Donskoy, Roshal, and Skersis) practiced the so-called “analytical conceptualism” of Komar and Melamid.²⁰ They came to the attention of the Moscow public during the 1975 unofficial exhibition organized at the VDNKh, when the artists sat in a nest hatching an egg, the event that gave them their name. Nest called its method “literal illustration” or “literal materialization,” and in most of its actions materialized a series of metaphors. The group created and raised, for example, a real “iron curtain,” illustrating the metaphor that had been used to describe the great division of the post-World War II world, or made “underground art,” literally shoveling earth to get down below it. These artists intended their actions to “be seen not read,” and they described their work in terms of spontaneous manifestations and the joy of creation. Nest did not care to document its work, for example, nor did it bother to invite spectators.²¹

19 The *Dictionary* defines “Emptiness” briefly and rather vaguely. “Emptiness” (*pustota*) – “an extraordinarily active ‘negative’ space directed toward everyday reality wishing to ‘swallow’ it.” *Monastyrsky, Slovar’ terminov moskovskoi kontseptual’noi shkoly*, 75.

20 Donskoy et al., *Gnezdo (The Nest)*, 12.

21 Ibid.

The aesthetics of KD and that of Nest may be contrasted using Yuri Albert's distinction between an "art of long stories perceived slowly" and an "art of short stories perceived quickly."²² While the latter definition seems better suited to the work of Nest, whose short-lived puns are quickly understood, the former corresponds to the work of KD, which is constructed according to an elaborate schema and which is generally more puzzling for the public. Monastyrsky wrote that the action itself, or its scenario, is a decoy and that the mythical or symbolical content (which is sometimes called the "eventful part" [*sobytiinaia chast'*]) is not important to the organizers. "We have no intention of 'showing' anything to the spectator; our task is to preserve the experience of waiting as an important, valuable event."²³ The eventful part of the action serves as mere preparation for opening up and activating a series of empty or undefined psychic processes. During their first phase, for example, KD attempted to target the [ES] of the participating spectators. "ES" is the "emotional space [or the degree of] emotional involvement of the spectator in the action."²⁴ The plot of the action only helps trigger a series of states and makes the spectator experience these states.

So far I have discussed the action as if from the perspective of the spectator-participants, and although this is an indispensable category without which one cannot imagine this group, it is still only half of the action. The other half comprises the tools and devices the artists introduce in order to provoke in the viewer those "empty" states of "prewaiting," "waiting," "looking," "listening," "understanding," and so forth. KD often refers to the place where the action takes place as the [Demonstrative Semiotic Field] (*Demonstratsionnoe znakovoe pole*) or simply "demonstrative field." This concept stands for the dynamic center of the action, which is constituted by the totality of psychic (subjective) and empirical (objective) elements.²⁵ The "demonstrative field" totalizes all the elements engaged in the action within one common domain, and one can say that this is the action itself, or the action as planned by the authors. Those elements that constitute the demonstrative field include the eventful part (plot), the objects involved, the role of the spectator-participants and even those states that the latter

22 Ibid., 21.

23 Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 22.

24 Monastyrsky, *Slovar' terminov moskovskoi kontseptual'noi shkoly*, 98.

25 Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod 1–5 vols.*, 22–23.

have experienced in their ES, from the moment when they received the invitation until the present where they hold their certificates. But these are only the subjective parts of the demonstrative field. The “objective” or empirical component of this field is the location of the action, namely the empty white snowy field on the outskirts of Moscow. The objective empirical emptiness of the real field and the empty states of expectation experienced by the spectators meet within the “demonstrative field.” “The real field undergoes a metamorphosis and at a certain moment it could be perceived as a continuation of the field of waiting.”²⁶

In order to provoke various perceptual states KD employs on its demonstrative field a series of tools. One of its most frequent tools is called the [Empty Action]. There have been many attempts to explain this term. The *Dictionary* defines an “empty action” (*pustoe deistvie*) as an element of KD’s work that constitutes the dramatic center of the action.²⁷ Another, more extensive definition, presents it as:

a principle that manifests differently in each action and must be understood as a segment of time in the action when the spectator remains in a state of a ‘tense lack of understanding,’ (or has a ‘wrong understanding’) of what is going on [in the action]... The action-means (or event-means) by which ‘empty action’ is achieved are [such moves from the side of the performers as] appearance, disappearance, moving away, which also create conditions for mediation on the level of perception.²⁸

The term “empty action” is best understood as a special kind of gesture, operation, or move that has a very limited degree of representation; it is an “action where the representation is reduced practically to zero and almost merges with the background—on the one hand the external background of the countryside, on the other the background of the internal psychological state of our spectators.”²⁹ For instance, the act of appearance (of the artist on the field as in the action *Appearance*) and that of disappearance or departure (of the artists from the field) are employed by the artists to

26 Ibid., 22.

27 Monastyrsky, *Slovar’ terminov moskovskoi kontseptual’noi shkoly*, 75.

28 Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 20–21.

29 Ibid., 306.

catch the attention of their spectator-participants and keep it for as long as possible in the “empty state” of their waiting or looking in order to understand. The effect of the empty action is best described in terms of a meditation practice, where the subject is focused for a long period of time on a certain object, idea, or psychological state.

KD introduces empty actions within the demonstrative field of the action in order to draw the spectators’ attention to the action, or “to create conditions for meditation on the level of perception.”³⁰ In the action *Appearance*, one example of “empty action” may be the emergence of the two dots far in the distance, and their movement on the white field, up to the moment when the spectators clearly perceive two figures. This “walking” is a very simple gesture; it is a “just walking” that lacks any drama or entertainment value which one often encounters in the actions and performances of many Western and other Moscow artists—for instance, in the case of Nest, as discussed above. It is the empty action that provokes empty states in the ES of the spectator-participants, and the two merge within the demonstrative field of the action.

In addition to the term “demonstrative field,” KD also lists in the *Dictionary* the term [Exposition Semiotic Field] (*expozitsionnoe znakovoe pole*), henceforth “exposition field.” The exposition field is constituted of all those elements that “were not deliberately included by the authors in the construction of a certain work, but which are nevertheless influencing the work.”³¹ The “exposition field” comprises those subjective and objective elements that are neither preplanned nor foreseen, but simply emerge as unanticipated side effects. For instance, the plot of the action *Appearance* has it that the group of spectator-participants will stand at the edge of the field and wait. If for some unexpected reason one of the guests refuses to wait there or suddenly starts to walk toward the tiny dots in the distance, interfering with the planned action, such an unannounced act would be part of the exposition field. Later KD artists would use the notion of the “exposition field” to refer to the urban or the natural context in which, or in the proximity of which, a certain action took place and which in turn influenced the action. All that is part of this field emerges spontaneously and, although the artists cannot control what happens, it remains an

30 Monastyrsky p. 21 or Kizevalter p. 108. Ibid.

31 Monastyrsky, *Slovar' terminov moskovskoi kontseptual'noi shkoly*, 97.

important part of the action. KD does not include in the *Dictionary* a special term to define the artist, but it seems that with the emergence of the term “demonstrative field” the artist turns into a “participant-organizer” [*uchastnik ustroitel'*].³² When both the spectator and the artist are included in the “demonstrative” or “exposition fields” they become accordingly “spectator-participants” and “participant-organizers,” and the common denominator “participant” is applied to both groups of *acting* and *reacting* agents.

But let us return to the field. Now the two groups (the authors who arrive earlier to prepare the action—A. Monastyrsky, L. Rubinstein, N. Alexeev, and G. Kizevalter—and the thirty spectator-participants who arrive later following the “universal operator of actuality”) merge into one party, and together they start up a dialogue; they share impressions, discuss, argue, and try out various interpretations. In this process of interpretation, some of the participants suggest to others that the “real” or the most important part of the action has not taken place on the empirical field. “What happened was not what we had expected, not that concrete event or action we waited for, but the waiting itself is what took place.”³³ The action itself—the emergence of two dots, then their transformation into two figures who walked toward the spectator-participants handing them certificates—was not what the action was about. They had deliberately used actions and gestures of a very low degree of “artistry” (empty actions) in order to suggest that what was really taking place in front of them was not as important as that which was emerging “inside” them. They were expected to “turn their eyes inward” and observe their own state of waiting, looking, listening, or any other state that might emerge in the emotional space of their own perception—for it is here where imagination, aesthetic judgment and art find their ground.

As they leave Kievogorskoe Field, the artists and spectators continue their discussions—through the grove, on the way to the station, in the warm car of the train, and inside the noisy central station in Moscow before parting. But the action *Appearance* is not yet complete. Before taking their leave, the organizers ask all the participants to write an account, a story in which they must describe what they experienced during the action. At

32 Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 23.

33 Ibid., 23.

the time of the action *Appearance* the tradition of writing a report did not yet exist in the practice of KD, and it was to be suggested four years later (1980) by Kabakov.³⁴ Since *Appearance* was KD's first action no report was written for it in particular. In the next several paragraphs I will construct a surrogate version of a report using quotes and paraphrases from several reports in which Kabakov describes his personal experiences during other actions of the first volume.³⁵

PARTICIPANT'S REPORT FOR THE ACTION "APPEARANCE"

"Some time has passed, and it would be interesting to call to mind what one experienced back on that day... I am now trying to remember what I do remember and not what I would have liked to remember, or any additional details" (58). The first thing I saw of KD was its action "Appearance." It was the first time I had taken part in this kind of performance—or, rather, event, and I remember that from the very beginning I was in an unexplainably good mood. It had something to do with the thought that we were all traveling somewhere, that we were on a journey and that this journey outside the city did not have any particular goal. This journey was unusual because maybe for the first time in my life I was not traveling somewhere for a particular goal; it involved no specific task, work, or any other kind of business-related activity. I also knew that we were not going somewhere in order to rest or to have fun, for even when you are invited to a party or when you go on vacation you know in advance that you will be eating, drinking, looking, or having fun, and this knowing beforehand, this sort of planning somehow contaminates the joy of experience, removing a good part of the excitement. Here, I felt as if a hidden layer of my psyche, which is in charge of comfort and well-being, had been freed—"it was freedom in the most direct sense of the word, a sense of freedom that could not be compared to practical, political, social, or any other kinds of freedom." (58) Something awaits you in the future that you cannot even imagine, and the fact of us all traveling to a place

34 Ibid., 777.

35 What follows is a paraphrase from Ilya Iosifovich Kabakov, "Rasskaz Kabakova (Ob aktsiakh 'Komedia,' 'Tretii variant,' 'Kartiny')," in Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 58–63. Verbatim translation is given in quotes.

where we were not sure what to expect created a certain psychological vacuum, a euphoric state filled with joy.

Next, I would like to mention our walk through the grove, because I clearly remember that at that moment I was thinking that I had strolled many times in the woods. But before, I always knew in advance why I had come here: to rest, to walk, to breathe a chest full of fresh air, etc. This time, when I had no clue as to what I was supposed to do, or even why I was there and what to expect I began, as I was walking, to pay very close attention to the trees, to the branches, to the bushes, to all those things I had previously ignored because I had been busy thinking about the final goal. Suddenly, as we left the grove behind, we were told to stop. I remember it was very cold, and that when we heard the voice the rest of our group stopped but I kept walking through inertia, looking at nature as if I were seeing it for the first time.

Then I also stopped. We were in front of that hunchbacked white field. It was extraordinary, as if it had been completely adorned with my own state of prewaiting. There was an interesting sense of communality among all those who had come here, and I remember telling someone that “the thing” which was about to happen may not even be shown to us because it was already here, it was already happening in the air, in the woods and, most importantly, within ourselves. There was no sense of anything artistic, either. I did not feel that they had invited us here and that now we would be shown “something,” something special they had invented for us: “yes, yes, get ready, we will show you what we’ve created—nothing of that sort took place. There were no backdrops, no machinery, and yet you somehow could see that even those who had invited you, even they did not entirely know what would happen. There was no sense of division between actors, who were there to show something, and spectators, who had come to watch—there was no division.” (59) As I was waiting I began to perceive the snowy field in front of me as a field of waiting and that particular time/space frame devoid of any activity became a continuum of pure waiting...

Suddenly someone said: “Look, look over there!” I clearly remember that only a while ago there had been nothing on that field, and in the next moment—a very important one—there was something. I followed someone’s forefinger and noticed far in the distance two tiny dots that swayed glimmeringly and indiscernibly on the large bright surface of that white empty field. Everything was taking place

so far away from me that I had the feeling that all that was happening depended entirely on how good my efforts were to see and discern it. I understood that at that point my psyche had completely merged with my own effort at looking. I felt that I was being offered a metaphor about art—if you keep looking you may see something, and if not... if not, then you'll see nothing, because everything in the end depends on your will, on your own consciousness. (60) Gradually I understood that their movement was somehow oblique, as if they were moving both toward and away from us, as if they were approaching and departing at the same time. Then slowly but surely I saw two figures walking toward us. It must be made clear that I did not have any such questions as "Why two figures?" "Who are they?" "What is all this supposed to mean?"—as if their gliding on the snow had annihilated all those questions. When I began to discern the figures, their facial features, the movement of their legs, the color of their attire, the bag that one of them held in his hand, I had a special satisfaction. Just a little while ago they had been so far away that it was simply impossible to recognize them as human beings, and now I was presented with a manifold of interesting elements and details. I felt as if I were being rewarded for my patient waiting. The organizers made sure that everything in the action was strictly established and maintained: the distance, silence, time, extensions, unexpectedness, the mythological component—an entire range of demonstrative elements had been introduced to produce states that had to unfold "inside" the spectator, and those emotions that the spectators experienced were not forced—there was no pressure perceived as either physical or emotional. The journey, the grove, the field, the emergence of the figures, my waiting, my looking at their slow movements, and then their approaching and handing us scraps of white paper, which I only read much later on the way to the station—all of these touched me on a perceptual level. For the first time I had the thought that everything which had taken place during that day had actually taken place "inside me," and that what had happened on the real field (the action itself) was only meant to be a trigger that activated some latent layers of my perception.

Ilya
KABAKOV

The participant reports are texts in which the spectators reconstruct on a scrap of paper the actions in which they participated. Such an approach brings to mind Akira Kurosawa's 1950 film *Rashomon*, where the plot is structured around the flashbacks of the main characters attempting to reconstruct events surrounding a crime. KD also asks its public to reconstruct the action, hoping that this will let them make a further step toward understanding the nature of art—their main aesthetic task. But this practice of writing reports, which from the early eighties on became central to the aesthetic investigations of KD, points again toward literature as one of the main sources of inspiration for the conceptualists.

Kabakov's opinion is that Moscow Conceptualism has its origin in Russian literature, and he elaborates on this theme in his text "Russian conceptualism." Unlike Western conceptual art, which emerged out of the tradition of the fine arts, Moscow Conceptualism, according to Kabakov, is rooted in literary tradition, beginning with such nineteenth-century Russian writers as Gogol, Dostoyevsky, and Chekhov and continuing into the twentieth century with the writings of Vvedensky and OBERIU, and of Saggir and Holin.³⁶ Kabakov has suggested that for the Communist Party it was much more difficult to supervise and control the literary avant-garde than the artistic avant-garde, and this is one of the reasons why, in the USSR, literature became the repository and the wellspring of subsequent artistic avant-garde traditions; for with regard to censorship there is a great difference between the intimate rustle of language in the privacy of one's own garret and the inevitable exhibitionism of painting.

KD had also resorted to the written text in order to carry out its aesthetic program, which during the first phase unfolded under the banner of "spiritual experience" (*dukhovnyi opyt*).³⁷ Both Monastyrsky and Kabakov's texts confirm this as the group's general direction during this time. The action is launched in order to trigger certain emotional states, and then the artist encourages the spectators to become fully aware of these experiences by communicating them to one another. During their first phase KD directed its efforts at achieving an almost mystical experience; its actions were spiritual practices in which the artists attempted to expand their own and their spectators' consciousness; the actions aimed toward achieving enlightenment. To put it in other words, it was during this

36 Quoted in Donskoy et al., *Gnezdo (The Nest)*, 17.

37 Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 23.

phase that the “nature of art” was primarily to be discovered, in the form of interactions among artists and spectators and in the impact of these interactions upon their imaginations or “souls”; the aesthetic experience was not entirely contingent upon the existence of beautiful or artistic objects in the world, and the role of the artist was to make both the artist and spectator aware of this by constructing empty states or “emptiness” (*pustota*) that alone might trigger the deepest of aesthetic experiences.

VOLUME II (PHASE 1980–83): *TEN APPEARANCES*

In the foreword to the second volume Monastyrsky announces the most important changes and transformations that took place during the second phase. First of all, three new artists joined the group—Igor Makarevich, Sergei Romashko, and Elena Elagina. The increase in the number of members also brought some changes to KD’s organizational policy. During the first phase the actions were signed by a “list of authors” (*spisok avtorov*)—where the artists were ranked according to the degree of their involvement in each action (the first name indicated the author who introduced the idea followed by those who had assisted him). From the second phase on, the group signed its works collectively with the abbreviation KD, a custom that would last until 1989.³⁸

But in spite of this growing sense of collectivity, the group was almost on the verge of dissolution. In the foreword to the second volume Monastyrsky suggests that the main cause for the crisis is the growing indifference, or “uninterestedness” (*neinterestnost*) of the spectator-participants.³⁹ Monastyrsky seems optimistic, however, stating that since KD’s main interest has always been the notion of “Nothing” (*nich’to*) (by which he means also “emptiness” [*pustota*], then perhaps “uninterestedness” maybe the essential quality of Nothing. He also suggests that “uninterestedness” must be incorporated into the group’s work and used as one of its artistic materials.⁴⁰ Thus the concept of “uninterestedness” is suggested to be the essential quality of KD’s art—an art concerned with the nature of nothing—

38 Ibid., 783.

39 Ibid., 116.

40 Ibid.

and it is also described as one of the main themes of the group during this phase.

Another important change that took place in the second phase concerned KD's methodology. If the first phase of KD (1976–80) was described in terms of “the winter-autumn qualities”⁴¹ of the empty snowy fields in the nearby “out-of-town-ness” of Moscow, the second phase, which began in 1980 and lasted until 1983, was marked by a shift toward representation. One can express this shift using KD's own lexicon and describe it as a passage from the “out-of-town-ness” to the “out-of-the-photography-space.”⁴² If in the previous phase the artists found pleasure in the simple experience of journeying outside Moscow, for the purpose of organizing eccentric activities and having a wholly spiritual or aesthetic experience, from the second phase on they became increasingly concerned with more practical issues of recording these escapades using various techniques of documentation. This shift is also announced in the subtitle of the second volume: “Journeys and Representations.” The new phase signals a move toward a more “artistic” problematic, as the emphasis on representation suggests. If in the first phase the overall impression was that KD tried hard to avoid any “artistry,” any “backdrops,” concealing any clue that might suggest that the action or the event had anything to do with art, and exploring instead liminal psychological or perceptual states, the second phase announces the theme of representation and the emphasis on various techniques of photographic, phonographic, and textual reproduction and recording. This new shift in the aesthetics and art of KD was termed the “factographical discourse” (*faktograficheskii diskurs*).⁴³

One way to describe this shift from the first to the second phase is to regard it from the perspective of some Eastern spiritual practices, one of the interests that brought the members of the group together—a perspective from which the second phase may appear somewhat regressive. In the

41 Ibid., 214.

42 “Out-of-photography-space” [*vnefotograficheskoe prostranstvo*]*—the space where the photographer is positioned during the shooting... [introduced in 1980] Monastyrsky, Slovar' terminov moskovskoi kontseptual'noi shkoly*, 141. Though “out-of-town-ness” was invented in 1985 (that is, five years after the “out-of-photography-space”) the idea of journeying to a space on the outskirts of Moscow was from the very beginning central to the work of this group.

43 Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 117.

first phase KD focused mainly on provoking various empty states (waiting, listening, trying to understand); its main artistic efforts aimed to attain “emptiness,” which was understood in a way very close to the notion of *shunyata* (or *sunyata*)—the Buddhist concept of emptiness, which presents a reality that lacks an immutable or an intrinsic nature and which regards any form-imposing or representational activities as illusory from the outset. If the first phase of KD seem to have unfolded in a state of innocence, a state in which the artists were not very much concerned with the problems of artistic formalization, documentation, and technique, in the second phase there is a tendency toward a more solemn professionalism, control, and materiality. KD brought in various tools and used them to mediate its relations with both the action and the spectator.

The shift that takes place in the second volume of *Journeys* is clearly perceived in the action *Ten Appearances*, organized in 1981 on Kievogorskoe Field. Similar to KD's first action, *Appearance*, discussed in the previous section, *Ten Appearances* was the first work of the second phase; it was in fact a modification, or even a remake of the 1976 action. Below is a summary of this action: a schema showing the movements of the actors on the field, followed by a comparison of the 1976 *Appearance* and the 1981 *Ten Appearances*, and concluding with a synopsis of Kabakov's report. The shift toward representation has also brought a series of new concepts, as explained below.

“TEN APPEARANCES” (DESEAT’ POIAVLENIÍ)

Ten spectator-participants together with the organizers arrive at the middle of a white snow-covered field surrounded by woods. The spectators know neither the name of the action nor what is to happen. In the middle of the field, the organizers have installed a wooden board (60 x 90 cm, or 23 x 35 inches) on whose surface are nailed ten bobbins reeled with up to 300 meters (325 yards) of white, sturdy thread. Each of the participants is then told to take the end of a thread from one of the bobbins and, after a start signal, to depart from the board in the center of the field towards the woods. Each spectator is asked to walk in a radiating line from the center of the field (SEE FIGURE 5). The participants walk 300 to 400 meters (325 to 433 yards) unreeling the thread from the bobbin. Walking in the field entails considerable physical effort, for the snow ranges from half a meter to a meter in depth (almost two feet

to more than three feet deep). When the participants reach the woods they walk another 100-150 meters (108-162 feet) until they cannot see the field from which they came, and stop. They wait for another signal that will announce the time when the participants must start pulling the end of the thread left on the board in the middle of the field. After pulling 300 to 400 meters of thread they find on the other end a piece of paper containing the factographical text (the name of the authors, the time and place of the action.) When the spectator-participants return to the center of the field they are given photographs (30 x 40 cm, or 12 x 16 in.) fixed on cardboard. On each of the ten photographs is represented that part of the woods where each participant has just been, with a small figure of somebody far in the distance emerging from the trees. Each photograph also contains a label with the name of the authors, the title of the action ("Ten Appearances"), and a reference to the appearance from the woods of the participant who has received it; for example, the participant Kabakov received a photograph with the caption: "the appearance of I. Kabakov on February 1, 1981." The photographs were prepared one week before the action, and the small figure in the distance was one of the artist-organizers who was photographed in the "zone of imperceptibility."

MOSCOW REGION, "KIEVY GORKY"

February 1, 1981

A. Monastyrsky,
G. Kizevalter,
S. Romashko,
N. Alexeev,
I. Makarevich,
E. Elagina.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ This is my own translation of the text from the second volume of the *Journeys*, 123-4. The translation is not verbatim. In order to make the course of the action more accessible to the reader and still express the spirit of KD's language I have omitted a few details (for instance, the names of the participants). I have also replaced the name of Ivan Chuikov with that of Ilya Kabakov, whose participant report I discuss below. For the full English translation of this action see "Ten Appearances" in Ross, ed., *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism*, 157-58.

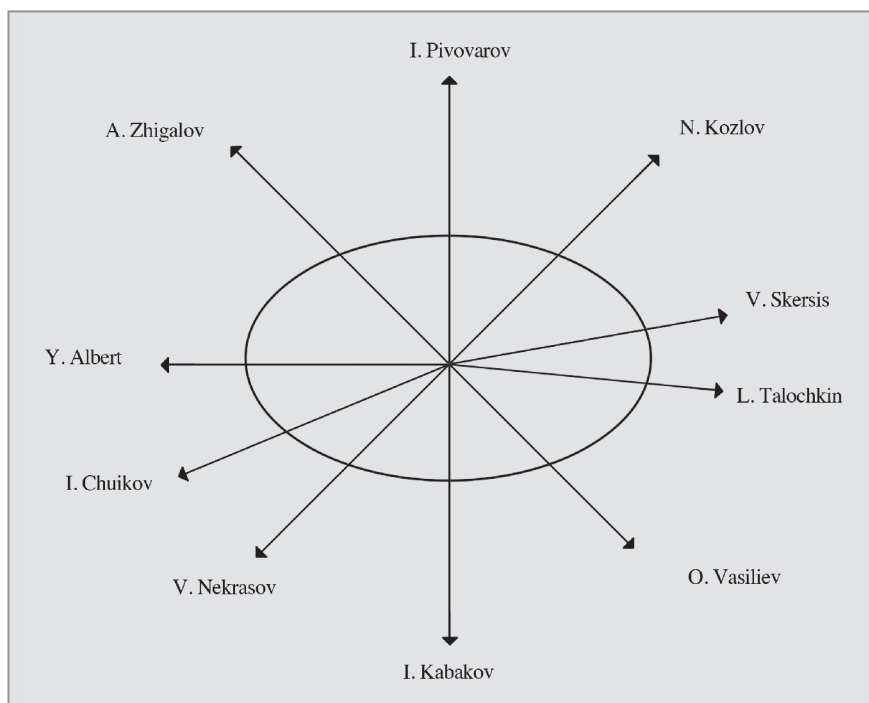


FIGURE 5: A. MONASTYRSKY, *TEN APPEARANCES*, DIAGRAM, 1981 (RECONSTRUCTED)

The first action of the second phase was similar in many respects to the first action of the first phase and to many other actions organized by the group, particularly in that it followed a similar plot. At first it was announced to the spectators that they were to attend a new action by KD, after which they all met under the big clock of one of the local Moscow train stations. They journeyed outside the city by train, chatting animatedly as they passed high-rise apartments, factories, bridges, and birch groves, moving into the white and empty kolkhoz fields of the countryside; finally, they disembarked and stepped onto the field in order to participate in the action described above. But there were also some differences.

From the point of view of the artist, the main change or innovation that took place in the second phase was the introduction of the so-called "factographical discourse." The *Dictionary* defines this as a "system of documentation, which helps to establish multiple levels within an action."⁴⁵ The factographical discourse can be regarded as the unfolding

45 Monastyrsky, *Slovar' terminov moskovskoi kontseptual'noi shkoly*, 90.

of the action on the level of documents: texts, photographs, and additional recorded material that supports an action or any other type of artwork. The introduction of the factographical discourse was like the discovery of another layer of reality, which from the second phase on ran parallel to other layers in the demonstrative field of the actions.

In the foreword to the second phase Monastyrsky also compares *Ten Appearances* to the earlier *Appearance*, maintaining that the latter took place in the so-called “eventful space,” or within the real or empirical space of the forest and the field, whereas the former action unfolded both in the “eventful space” and in the space of the “factographical discourse”; that is, in the documents and photographs of the action. He also announces that it was precisely this action that opened this new discourse for KD.

...the action “Ten Appearances” has activated the space of the factographical discourse and announced it as a new artistic context, as a new element of the “demonstrative field.” Now to those components that constitute the “demonstrative field” may be also added the existence of the factographical discourse, defined as the layer of language whose text-forming material may be perceived as aesthetically self-sufficient.⁴⁶

Thus the demonstrative field, which stands for all those elements included by the artists in the construction of the action, acquired during the second phase a third factographical layer, one belonging to the realm of representation. The factographical discourse came forward and became, from this phase on, more important than the other discourses or components of the demonstrative field.

To the psychic (subjective) and the empirical (objective) dimensions of the demonstrative field, KD added a third dimension, which operated on a level constructed by various forms of mechanical reproductions (e.g., text, photo, sound). Emptiness, the main theme of KD, spread now into all these three layers. If in the action *Appearance* of 1976 it was the snowy field that was empty and this emptiness merged with the empty states of the spectators who were waiting to see what would happen, now in 1981 the emptiness also extended, by means of photography, into the third zone

⁴⁶ Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 118.

or layer of the factographical discourse. After the participants returned to the middle of the field they were handed out labeled “empty photographs” that depicted a gray sky and a black strip of forest that stretched out into the distance over the large white Kievogorskoe Field, and likewise showed a tiny human figure far in the distance emerging from the trees. It soon became a KD tradition to give to its spectators, at the end of each action, “souvenirs”—a photograph or another token, an artifact of the factographical discourse.

With the introduction of the factographical discourse a series of new concepts entered the group's lexicon. Such terms as “empty photographs” (*pustye fotografii*), “imperceptibility” (*nevidimost'*), “the zone of imperceptibility” (*polosa nerazlichenia*), and “the out-of-the-photography-space” (*vnefotograficheskoe prostranstvo*)⁴⁷ registered the emergence of the new layer and the shift toward documentary representation. The term “out-of-the-photography-space,” for instance, suggests the space where the photographer is positioned during the shooting (behind the viewfinder of the camera). If in the first phase the artists expressed their interest in terms of liminal psychological states that emerged during the action within the “emotional space” (ES) of the spectator, then from the second phase on it appears that the artists were more interested in the liminal position of the photographer who documented their actions. By raising this position to the level of a concept, KD also emphasizes its new direction and priorities. It is a general tendency to move the action from what earlier was called “out-of-town-ness”—that is, the natural countryside surroundings in which the actions once took place—into that of “out-of-the-photography-space” that defines the place of the artist or of the assistant in charge of taking pictures. The artists appear to have become more interested

47 “Empty photographs [*pustye fotografii*—‘central’ works of photography in the actions of KD, where nothing (or almost nothing) is shown other than ‘deliberate emptiness.’” “Imperceptibility [*nevidimost'*—demonstrative relation in the aesthetics of KD (part of ‘KD categories’)” [introduced in 1980] Monastyrsky, *Slovar' terminov moskovskoi kontseptual'noi shkoly*, 148.

“Zone of imperceptibility” [*polosa nerazlichenia*—zone of the “demonstrative field” (often bordering the “exposition field”) where certain audio and visual objects cannot be recognized by the spectator as belonging to the action [first mentioned in 1979]. Ibid., 71.

“Out-of-photography-space” [*vnefotograficheskoe prostranstvo*—the space where the photographer is positioned during the shooting [introduced in 1980]. Ibid., 141.

in the new space offered by the photographs, phonograms, and other forms of technical recordings, and all these seem to have diverted KD's attention from their initial interest in the pure unmediated perception of their spectators and the psychology of perception that dominated the first phase's methodology of investigating the nature of art. Moreover, the new style of conducting the action, and KD's reliance on certain mediatory tools (directions, instructions, signals) also introduced a certain degree of tension into the relation between the artists and their spectators.

The role of the spectator during the second phase was also modified. In the 1976 action *Appearance* the spectators' degree of participation was limited to the act of mere passive witnessing. In *Ten Appearances*, and other actions of the second phase, KD demanded that the spectator get involved in the actions, that he or she indeed become a "spectator-participant." In his report on the action *Ten Appearances*, Kabakov expresses some of his concerns with regard to his participation in this action:

It must be said that it was agreed in advance that those who decide to attend must also participate in the performance . . . and that the presence of those who will refuse to act is undesired. This mandatory tone has created from the very beginning some esotericism, some closure of the situation, for usually we attended KD's actions with our friends, and each such action always had the character of a free and emancipated presence. But now the tension produced by these constraints has generated a circle that seems to have detached and set us all apart from everyday life.⁴⁸

When the spectators respond to the invitation and agree to attend the action, they sign themselves up in advance as a constituent part of the action. The spectator-participant may even have the impression that the agreement to participate has turned him or her into a module of a mysterious machine. Kabakov's reports from this phase are different in tone from those he had written a few years earlier. Earlier, he described his experience of attending an action by KD using such positive words as "freedom" "comfort," and

⁴⁸ See "Rasskaz I. Kabakova [Ob aktsii 'Desiat' poeiavlenii']" in Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 151.

"joy."⁴⁹ Now, he speaks about "worries," "fears," and "tiredness"; he also reports on his nervousness over missing the signal, his exhaustion from trudging in deep snow, his anxiety over how many hours it would take to pull all that thread, and whether the organizers had not added in the meantime more thread to the bobbin, and finally his suspicions that the organizers may have involved him in a very unpleasant and precarious situation. (152) This anxious tone is also present in other actions from this phase. In the action *Dark Place* (*Temnoe mesto*) he complained about his difficulty in following the directions, as well as about how absurd it must have felt to listen to someone's instructions and to perform these abstruse actions amid nature, among trees and leaves.

I experienced the most horrible degree of psychological discomfort... I could neither follow nor understand anything. It seems as if I cannot take part in this business as a participant but only as a spectator.⁵⁰

In his participant's report for the action *Ten Appearances*, Kabakov wrote that he became more relaxed only after he had finally pulled all that long thread and found at the end a scrap of paper. Upon reading the names of the authors, the place and the date of the action, and not hearing any other signal, he turned around to head back. "I was filled with such joy that I almost started jumping from one hole (footprint) into another, scrambling back, because I was enormously joyful about everything that had happened to me."⁵¹ Kabakov experienced this powerful sense of relief and pleasure at the moment when he thought that the action had ended, and he was thus finally absolved of the embarrassment of following instructions. His excitement was so high that he did not even mention receiving the photographs of the factographical discourse—photographs whose receipt, according to the organizers, should have marked the "real" end of the action. What Kabakov did not know when he ran back, treading in his own footprints on the snow, was that for KD the action had not yet ended and that he was part of an experiment through which the group was investigating the conditions pertaining to the end of an action.

49 See above Kabakov, "Rasskaz Kabakova [Ob aktsiakh 'Komedia,' 'Tretii variant,' 'Karti-ny')." Ibid., 58–63.

50 See "Rasskaz Kabakova [Ob aktsii 'Temnoe mesto'].," 174–5.

51 Ibid., 153.

One of the questions with which the KD artists concerned themselves throughout their group history involved the moment when an action begins and ends. In 1999, at a symposium in Vienna, Monastyrsky explained this problematic to a large audience:

A group of spectators gather during a sunny April day on an empty snowy field. Suddenly a bell begins to ring from somewhere under the snow. Nothing else takes place. The spectators leave the field, but the bell is still ringing. Has the action ended, or not yet? The spectators don't know yet and they will find out only later when they familiarize themselves with the description of the action and with the commentaries on it. These elements of "nothing-taking-place" we call "empty actions." These are like pauses in John Cage's 4'33". Similar cases of "empty waiting" are in Kabakov's "empty" works.⁵²

In the action *Ten Appearances* the artists also investigated the question of the end of the action. If in the 1976 *Appearance* the eventful part or what took place on the field ended when the artists handed out certificates, five years later the action did not end when the spectators had pulled the thread with the names of the artists, but when they had been given the photographs, the factographical discourse. Officially the action *Ten Appearances* ended when all ten participants returned to the center of Kievogorskoe Field and each was given an "empty photograph." By handing these photographs to the spectator-participants the participant-organizers exercised their artistic authority and certified the official end of the action. It was "the author's signature under the artwork."⁵³

The problematic of the end of the action is important due to the divergence that exists between the time when the spectators think that the work has ended, and the time when the author has actually planned to end it. In the case of *Ten Appearances*, the spectators may have read the names of the authors at the end of the thread as the artist's signature that announced the resolution of the work. This fact made them modify their further behavior on the field. Since they had not received any particular signal or instruction as to when they must return, or whether they must return to the same place

52 Monastyrsky, "Rybak," in *TransArt: Simposium 10 und 11 Mai 1999, Akademie der Bildenden Künste* (Vienna: 1999), [unpaginated].

53 Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 132.

from which they had started, not all of them came back to where the action had begun. Out of the ten participants who had left the middle of the field at the beginning of the action, only eight returned following the same route. The other two took a leisurely walk and arrived at the actual end of the action later and by different paths. In other words, once they thought the action had ended they became more relaxed; they felt relieved of obligations and no longer part of a construct called "action" or "art."

When Kabakov finally returned to the middle of the field he was handed a labeled photograph mounted on cardboard. The photograph looked almost empty: a large white field, some trees in the background and a grey winter sky. It seemed to be a picture of the same Kievogorskoe Field in which they all had gathered that day. Initially Kabakov might not even have observed on his picture a tiny black dot, the figure of somebody appearing from the woods, if one of the artists had not pointed it out. The confusing label on this piece of cardboard (which the artists strangely called "the factographical discourse")—which read, "the appearance of I. Kabakov on February 1, 1981"—aimed to suggest that it was he who was appearing from the woods. This may have caused Kabakov some puzzlement, for how could the artists have managed, in such a short time, to take a photograph, develop the film, print the pictures, fix them on cardboard, write and then label each photograph? When he realized, or was told, that there was not as much snow that day as there was in the photograph, and that the figure in the distance on this piece of factographical discourse was simply one of the artists who had traveled there one week earlier, he may have felt that this confusion that the artists called "empty action" was simply manipulative.

For KD, on the other hand, this interval at the end of the action in which the spectator abided in a state of bewilderment, thinking that he had left the frame of the action and stepped outside the realm of art (when in fact he hadn't) was the most important part of the work. This was the effect of the empty action, which the artists often described in terms of a state of unawareness, or a tense lack of understanding. What was new in this action was the fact that the artists were now using photographs to produce these empty states. If before the introduction of the factographical discourse the empty actions were performed by the artists, who were appearing or disappearing from the empty field, or were lying down in a pit, blowing a whistle, pulling a thread, and performing many other variants of empty actions using their own bodies, from the second phase on the artists began to use tools, devices and techniques of representation to achieve a similar end.

After more than five years of continuous work there came a critical period in which it appeared that the innocent first phase of KD had passed and that the artists had entered a kind of adolescence. The group went through a difficult period. Two of its members (Monastyrsky and Kizevalter) suffered from serious psychiatric problems and, in addition, its high degree of hermeticism and obscurity began to annoy and alienate a good part of the spectators. Moreover, not everyone liked the factographical discourse. Disputes and differences of opinion also began to multiply within the group, as some members became dissatisfied with the latest developments within KD. Nikita Alexeev, who had been with KD since the beginning, was one such dissatisfied member. He ceased to participate in the actions, though he remained a member-observer. At that time Alexeev felt that KD's time was over, that the group was on the verge of disintegration.⁵⁴

For Alexeev the main problems with KD during this time were its loss of dynamism, its elitist hermeticism, and its monotony. Despite the changing political atmosphere and the new climate within unofficial artists' circles, KD's style had gone unchanged for seven years. Alexeev writes, "it would have been unthinkable to expect from them something nasty, provocative and dangerous," something that would resemble the work of the Mukhomors (Toadstools) group.⁵⁵ The latter was a group of five young artists whom Monastyrsky had mentored and who for a while had been part of Kabakov's circle. Mukhomors was renowned for writing provocative and humorous political proclamations, as well as for organizing actions and performances in which they poked fun at the Soviet state, at Margaret Thatcher, and the Falkland Islands, as well as at the circle of conceptual artists who permitted them to attend their closed meetings.⁵⁶ Unlike other gatherings of artists in Moscow (e.g., Prigov's circle, or the circle of the Sots artists), Kabakov's circle was known to be closed and hermetic and its members were very reluctant to accept new people into their secretive gatherings—a trait that also translated to the art of KD. In his 1983 text

⁵⁴ Ibid., 193–98.

⁵⁵ Mukhomors (Toadstools)—a group of artists, writers, musicians, and authors of proclamations. The group was active in Moscow from 1978 to 1984 and included Sven Gundlakh, Konstantin Zvezdochetov, Vladimir and Sergey Mironenko, and Alexey Kamensky. Dyogot and Zakharov, *Moskovskii kontseptualizm*, 228.

⁵⁶ On the relation between Mukhomors and Kabakov's circle see Solomon, *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost*, 97–106.

Alexeev wrote about his dissatisfaction with both organizational and artistic issues within the group:

I felt that KD had become a kind of elitist cabaret for Kabakov and Chuikov and the rest of them. . . . At the beginning, ideas were approved or taken up by everyone in the group together, and we did only what everyone in the group wanted to do. Then Andrei [Monastyrsky] became more authoritarian, and he began to push for his own ideas.⁵⁷

Besides criticizing some organizational aspects of the group Alexeev also wrote that he had gradually become more and more skeptical as to whether the group was doing anything interesting and relevant. He insists that KD's art was not conceptual, or as he wrote, "not cerebral enough," especially when compared to the work of such artists as Art & Language, Kosuth, or even the Muscovites Komar & Melamid or Yuri Albert. (196) To him the second phase was the time when KD lived in a state of life-after-death, in which the same things were repeated over and over again. He even cites the appearance of some bourgeois trends, a certain conventionalism that makes the group look like a travel agency, which organizes regular journeys for a hungry group of townsfolk nostalgic for the countryside. Artistically the group had been also stalling.

The structure of the actions has increased to such an extent that it has become incomprehensible not only to the participants but also to the authors. At the same time the volume of interpretations has grown catastrophically: there are interpretations by authors, interpretations by participants, then re-interpretations of those authors who often do not agree with each other, and so on, and so on. Such a volume of reasoning may create the illusion that there is serious research that aims at creating an original theory of perception. But most of the time there was a sense that this was not the case and that all these philosophical-psychological constructions were empty and lacked sense. Suddenly, I had the impression that in what we were doing there was no research method, and that we had been simply involved in a meaningless discussion on an unclear theme.⁵⁸

57 Ibid., 107.

58 Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 195–6.

Alexeev was wrong when he determined that KD was falling apart in the early eighties, as the group is still active almost thirty years later. But there is one thing he was right about: the group's so-called "mummification" during that period. Indeed, toward the middle of the eighties, KD's journeys, but most importantly its ways of exploring the nature of art, began to harden into various rules, methods, concepts, artifacts and objects, registering a new process for which I will use the term "objectification." In 2007 Monastyrsky described this important transition that took place in the second phase in the following terms:

After the first volume of the *Journeys* practically the entire space-event and existential horizon of KD was completely covered with text, traces, marks, and so forth. From 1981, all our subsequent activity consisted of work done in two directions: on one hand, a more intensive production or layering of texts, traces, and marks; and on another, an attempt to poke holes in these layers, for each action was a hole in the texts produced earlier.⁵⁹

The texts, marks, and traces are the factographical discourse that KD adopted in the early eighties. The emergence of the *Journeys* itself may be regarded as a result of this shift. From this second phase on the main task of the group shifted from action, and what they had directly experienced on Kievogorskoe Field, to the process of documenting, recording, reproducing, and interpreting that experience. The representational or documentary possibilities of experience now mattered the most. But the turn toward the factographical discourse, or to representation, also meant a certain degree of distancing and estrangement from direct experience, prompting Monastyrsky to use the metaphor of the space suit in order to describe this shift. The factographical discourse became like the transparent visor of the space or the diving helmet (*skafandry faktografii*) that separated the artists from their previous rough and unmediated experience.

In the actions "Ten Appearances" (*Deseat' poiavlenii*) and "Recording" (*Vosproizvedenia*) the events took place on the real field. But after these two actions the events turned into photographs of the out-of-

59 Monastyrsky, "Skafandry faktografii" *Predislovie k 7-9 tomam 'Poezdok za gorod,'* in Monastyrsky, "Poezdki za gorod: 6-10 vols." [unpaginated].

town fields, as if we had been separated from reality by a factographical film. It was as if we had been suddenly put into the space suits of the factographical discourse, and kept those suits in our subsequent actions. But the place itself had also been covered by a thin layer of film that belonged to the factographical discourse. . . . The removal of the factographical space helmet during the action did not guarantee a return to reality, to a real sky, field, and so forth, because this reality was already of the second order and it was also covered by a layer of film, or a helmet. And although the space helmet could be removed because it was within reach, on our heads, then to remove the factographical layer of film that had covered the woods, the field, and the sky was impossible. It was out of reach. Kievogorskoe Field was irreversibly transformed into a space shuttle (a mechanism) that flew from action to action in the cosmos of logos. In fact, the field research of the first volume has ended and we have turned to the usual frame of art and literature.⁶⁰

The helmet of the factographical discourse, that layer of film that, from the beginning of the second volume on, covered the woods, the field and the sky, is the regime of representation imposed on a previously unmediated experience. The transformations that take place in this volume indicate a certain degree of "artification" of KD's practice, insofar as these artists emphasize the role of the document, the recording, the text, or the object that appears during the unfolding of the action. If in the first volume the artists invited their spectators to a collective meditation in which they were encouraged to observe different experiences provoked by a series of actions organized in the "clean," or ideology-free space of the "out-of-town-ness," from the second volume—with the institution of the *Journeys* and of the factographical discourse—the artists demand that the spectators contribute on various levels to the production and the interpretation of each action. From this phase on, an action is no longer a passive disinterested meditation that awaits its moment of enlightenment (for instance, the handing over of certificates attesting the spectators' presence during the 1976 action *Appearance*), but begins to resemble more and more a process or an object of study. KD continues to present

the action as an investigation of art's conditions of possibility and of the limits of aesthetic experience—of when, for example, an action ends and when it begins—except that now this investigation is carried out within the newly established realm of documentation. Now, both spectator and artist question, record, collect, share, exchange, theorize, criticize, or interpret each element or gesture that appears within the field of action by exchanging documents. Each action is minutely dissected and studied, and the factographical discourse becomes the instrument of this aesthetic dissection while *Journeys Outside the City*—for the most part still handwritten—turns into the group's research log and chronicles.

VOLUME III (PHASE 1983–85): *DISCUSSION*

I begin my discussion of the third volume of *Journeys* with an action that took place in 1985—at the end of the third phase of KD's Soviet period. The action is called *Discussion (Obsuzhdenie)*, a work I chose because it illustrates well a series of new trends and developments in the evolution of the group during this period. This action also offers a glimpse of the process of interpretation in which the spectator-participants often had to engage. A translation of a part of the description of the action *Discussion* is accompanied by some of the reactions and opinions expressed by the spectator-participants, then by my interpretation of the main shifts that took place during this phase.

"DISCUSSION" (*OB Suzhdenie*)

This action, which took place in the apartment of A.M. [Andrei Monastyrsky], consisted of two parts. During the first fifty-five minutes of the action, the spectators listened to the phonogram of a text by A.M. called "TZI-TZI." During the reading of this text, another voice was announcing (every three minutes): "This is a reading of A.M.'s text TZI-TZI. The Tautology of Empty Action."

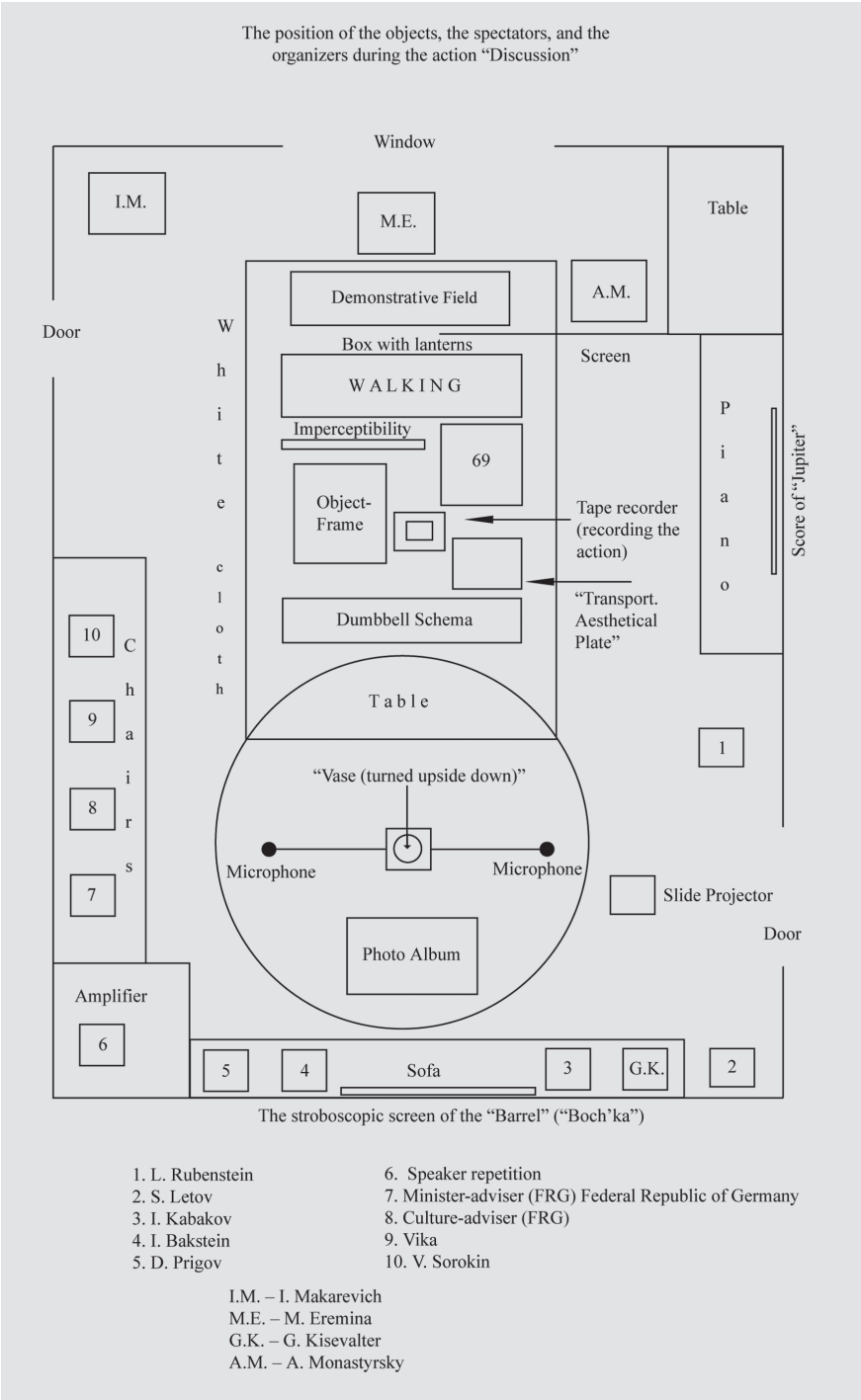


FIGURE 6: A. MONASTYRSKY, *THE POSITION OF THE OBJECTS, THE SPECTATORS, AND THE ORGANIZERS DURING THE ACTION "DISCUSSION."* DIAGRAM, 1985 (RECONSTRUCTED).

Ten objects collectively called “Categories of KD” were placed in the center of the room. (See Figure 6.) Eight of them were on a white cloth spread on the floor; two, on a round table. One end of the cloth covered a long black box, inside which the organizers had placed four lanterns that shone through the white cloth, and on top of this was a board entitled “Demonstrative Field.” The biggest object, a wooden plank called “Walking,” was positioned next to the box, on the white cloth on the floor. The following text was written with a black marker across its top: “(KD, Categories, Black Men’s Overcoat (1 pc.). Walking. Moscow Region, next to the village Kievsky Gorky. 1976–1985.)”

Closer to the table, under “Walking,” was placed the object “Imperceptibility.” To the right of “Imperceptibility” was object “‘69,” represented by a mattress cover wrapped in a golden foil and fastened to two pieces of plywood. Glued on the upper piece was a page from John Cage’s score *Water Music*. This page also contained the schedule of trolley no. 69—which goes from the Southern gates of the VDNKh to the Petrovskie Gates. “Object Frame”—a pile of numbered black cardboard pieces that had been used as part of the interior object-frame during the action “Translation”—was put under “Imperceptibility.” On the right came the object “Transport. The Aesthetic Plate”—an assemblage constructed out of pages from the German magazine *Guten Tag*, wooden frames, and metallic fittings in the form of wings and stars—all piled up together. On the back of this pile was glued a photograph from the action “Translation” (*Perevod*).

On a plastic support in between “Object Frame” and “Aesthetic Plate” there was a walkman whose tape cover was marked, as with the other objects, with an inscription: “Categories of KD. The Tautology of the Empty Action. DISCUSSION. (phonogram) 1985.” The recording that the walkman was making was the object that would in the end to be produced by the action “Discussion.” Finally, next to the table, on the white cloth, came the object “Dumbbell Schema”—a long cardboard box fastened by ropes and containing two winter hats, one six-pound dumbbell, and two enemas. . . .

After the spectators had looked at the objects comprising “Categories of KD,” a screen was hung in between the piano and the white cloth.

On the screen, written in black letters, was this: "KD. Categories. The Perspectives of Speech Space. Discussion. 1985." Next came a soundtrack, TZI-TZI, accompanied by slides from the actions "Russian World" and "Burrell." When this ended, the discussion of the paper and the objects began after a five-minute break. The upper light was switched off and the "Vase (turned upside down)" was switched on. The screen now displayed the first slide from the series "Fragments" and "Hidden City." At that point, Georgii Kizevalter, who was in charge of showing slides, read a short introductory text (see the stenographic record). In the meantime this text was repeated through the speakers by A.M., who sat behind the screen so he could not be seen by the spectators as he listened to their comments and repeated them into the microphone, which was connected to a speaker on the other side of the room. A.M. never entered into discussion with the spectators (see stenographic record). . . .

MOSCOW

September 28, 1985

A. Monastyrsky,
G. Kizevalter,
M. Eremina,
I. Makarevich.⁶¹

This is an abridged translation of the description of the action *Discussion*. In the group's lexicon this action belongs to the category "domestic," which means that it took place not outside the city (on Kievogorskoe Field) but in Moscow (in Monastyrsky's apartment). From the end of the second phase and through the third one many of KD's actions belonged to the category "domestic." Part of the problem was the previously mentioned problem of "uninterestedness," which had arisen during the second phase and which indicated a lack of interest among the spectators. Many of these "domestic" actions were a sort of revenge for the spectator-participants' lack of interest, as well as an attempt to provoke in them a nostalgia for KD's signature work—the journeys outside the city.⁶² The crowded

61 Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 384–87.

62 Ibid.

atmosphere of the action *Discussion* (fifteen persons packed into a tiny Moscow apartment along with a number of objects) aimed to conjure up (for spectators) images of the famous expanse of the Russian steppes, as well as thoughts of the fresh air and natural beauty of Kievogorskoe Field. In the foreword to the third volume, Monastyrsky confirms that another key aim of this phase was to evoke nostalgia among the spectators for journeying again to the countryside.⁶³ I shall return to this issue later, but for now I will examine the action *Discussion* in order to point to what I believe were the major shifts in the art and aesthetics of KD during this phase.

Although it was not the habit of KD artists to give the spectators details on any of their next planned actions, this time Monastyrsky had called Joseph Backstein asking for his help. The latter was not only a spectator, but also an organizer and as the term “Backstein Function” suggests, he was already emerging as the main “universal operator of actuality” among the Moscow conceptualists. Monastyrsky informed Backstein about the upcoming action, asking him to help organize a discussion. The discussion was to take place around Monastyrsky’s reading of a text entitled “TZI-TZI” (a baffling piece of writing that analyzed the recent activity of KD), as well as around nine objects made also by Monastyrsky that were to be exhibited on a white cloth in the middle of the apartment (SEE ABOVE DESCRIPTION AND FIGURE 6). The main peculiarity of the text TZI-TZI was its logic, recalled Backstein in his participant report: “To say that this was the traditional logic of the absurd would not be accurate, although it resembled it in many respects.”⁶⁴ The same could be said for the eight objects that had been placed on the white cloth in the apartment. Their logic was also “completely incomprehensible for the uninitiated. . . . These were not objects but a complete absurdity.” (414) After Monastyrsky read the text, the moderator, Backstein, encouraged the spectators to comment on both the nature of the text and the objects in front of them.

The action was organized in such a way as to ensure that each time someone said something, Monastyrsky instantly repeated his or her utterance as he sat behind a screen and “parroted” everything into a microphone. The so-called “parroting technique” made it more complicated to speak and to stay focused on anyone’s speech. The action appears to have dealt

⁶³ Ibid., 222.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 415.

with the task of determining the necessary prerequisites for a discussion, or what was needed to be able to exchange ideas on a particular matter; to see if it was still possible to exchange opinions and reach a conclusion when most of the required conditions for a discussion had been either removed, or impeded—for example, in the absence of a clearly defined subject or object of discussion—as well as the unavailability of a proper context or atmosphere for such an exchange to take place.

The first to enter the discussion was the spectator-participant called “Vika” (short for Viktoria, a name that stood apart from those spectators who could be identified by their patronymics and surnames). Vika (Viktoria Molchanova-Kabakova) questioned whether what they witnessed was to be regarded as absurd or as art:

KD has already taught us that everything which may initially seem absurd may not be so. . . . I, for instance, find this interesting because twentieth-century art has often seen the reverse. One searches for traces of the absurd in something that common sense may not consider to be so; for example, the sitting of the family at the dinner table, or the consumption of art, and many, many other situations that we know from works by local and above all by Western artists. There the task is to discover the absurd in normal, everyday life, and here, I think, the overall tendency is to find sense in something that seems to lack any meaning from the outset.⁶⁵

Vika then suggested that perhaps the main theme of KD's actions was incomprehension, and that the group's strange actions were forcing spectators to make a journey from incomprehension to comprehension; she proposed that the action *Discussion* was basically about interpretation. The moderator, Backstein, tried to encourage others to participate, but the rest were passive and this line of discussion led nowhere.

Next, the moderator asked the poet Dmitry Prigov to contribute to the debate. Unlike the previous speaker, Prigov was more critical of KD's actions. He began by arguing that Monastyrsky tended to build for his actions structures that were broader and broader each time. Everything was included in his actions: the apartment, the trolley, the code, the entire

65 Ibid., 395.

universe, and each time Monastyrsky composed it in a different way; one wondered why one should organize these kinds of actions at all. When there are no criteria according to which a spectator can negotiate or even disagree with the author, then the only choice left is to accept what the artists have proposed and become in this way part of the action. Prigov found such an approach to be too elitist and discriminatory, and for him, the biggest problem was that KD treated its spectators as objects. "What is the role that the artists attribute to the participants invited here?" asks Prigov, responding: "He [the spectator] is turned into an object... and when he is turned into an object then all he needs is comfort and nothing else."⁶⁶ Kabakov expressed a similar point of view. Sitting on the sofa next to the moderator, he spoke only at the end of the discussion, as if drawing the final conclusion. He compared the atmosphere constructed during *Discussion* to an environment, to a universe under the dominion of its own unique laws. Like the former speaker, he also mentioned the feeling of being turned into an object, and expressed his feeling, as he always did, in a very entertaining and metaphorical way:

For a while I forget who I am, why I am, and how I ended up here, whether there was a yesterday and whether there will be a tomorrow, what the time is and what will happen today and after that. I exist only in the state of now, as if I am in the dentist's chair, and begin to understand everything around me only from the position of the patient. It is a complete paralysis of my subjectivity, of my will, of my reactions and so forth. I feel like I am on the couch of the psychologist, of the therapist, of the gynecologist—whoever. What is he going to do now? I don't know. Luckily Andrei did not knock out my teeth, did not hit me, and everything went fine.⁶⁷

OBJECTIVE ZONE

The sense of discomfort that both Prigov and Kabakov reported, expressed in terms of feeling excluded from the zone of the action, is consistent with other processes that took place in the art of KD during this phase. Even

⁶⁶ Ibid., 393.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 396.

if the artists did not intend to mistreat their spectators, the new methods and techniques they adopted in order to examine the nature of art began to acquire a certain hardness, as if everything had been covered with a layer of crust. "Objectification" is the word I use to describe the changes that occurred in the third phase. Doing so is especially appropriate given the fact that Monastyrsky himself uses it while discussing the changes that took place in that phase.

In the foreword to the third volume, Monastyrsky makes known a new direction in the group's work. He writes that the group must reject the method used in the previous phases, when the artists examined the nature of art by investigating such psychological states as waiting, looking, understanding, and so forth. The group's fixation on various stages of waiting in the first and second phase (the "Theory of Waiting") must be abandoned, for one could not go beyond the level of "accomplished waiting," writes Monastyrsky (226). He suggests that the psychology of perception and KD's previous direction toward the expansion of consciousness and enlightenment—its favorite method in the late seventies and early eighties—needed to be declared a dead end, as unfit for carrying out serious aesthetic research. The previous approach had not only been annoying to spectators, but it had also caused some serious and "irreversible psychological deviations" to some of KD's members. Monastyrsky had suffered a mental breakdown in the early eighties, believing it to have been caused by the group's method of investigating the nature of art through the prism of the psychology of perception and his constant search for profound and ecstatic spiritual experiences. Now, he decided to give up any attempts to attain an expanded consciousness, and to use another method for constructing KD's actions. The new method is described in terms of the "ontology of perception that must replace the former psychology of perception" (226). Thus the new direction in KD's aesthetic investigation during the third phase could be expressed in terms of a shift from psychology to ontology, from the study of various subjective and emotional states of the artists and their spectators to the broader examination of being itself. The new methodology would allow the group to take into account other phenomenal and noumenal aspects of its actions. This was one of the main factors that caused the artists to turn toward the object—an element of the action that had previously been accorded less attention.

In the foreword to the third volume Monastyrsky warns the reader to pay special attention to the "objective zone of the demonstrative field."

The latter is another concept introduced during this third phase in order to explain the shift that had occurred in regard to the status of the object.

In our previous actions the objects played a secondary role as devices that helped us create certain perceptual effects or factographical signs given to the spectators after the actions. Later, the specifics of the actions of the third volume allow the objects an aesthetic independence; they may be exhibited without accompanying documentation (descriptive texts, photographs of the actions where they are used.)⁶⁸

As if in order to emphasize the new aesthetic independence granted to the object during this phase, the artist includes a list of objects in this volume, describing the material from which each was made and naming the action in which each of them was used. Most of the objects produced for the actions of this volume were painted in gold and black, and Monastyrsky describes this third phase of KD in terms of the "golden decadence" and the "black decadence" (221). It might be reasonable to expect that as conceptual artists KD's members should have strived toward a greater degree of dematerialization and conceptuality. Instead, and like other representatives of international conceptualism, their careers moved toward a greater fetishization of the object. In the case of Western conceptualism, one might blame the invisible hand of market economics for the fetishization and commodification to which many conceptual artists succumbed after their enthusiasm for the dematerialization of the art object faded away at the end of the "six years" (1966–1972) or the "golden decade" of conceptualism (1965–1975).⁶⁹ In Moscow, where there were still three entire years left before the auction house Sotheby's stepped in, announcing in 1988 the beginning of the liberalization and the emergence

⁶⁸ Ibid., 219.

⁶⁹ These are two periodizations of conceptual art. For "Six Years" see Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: the Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972; a cross-reference book of information on some esthetic boundaries* (New York: Praeger, 1973). For the ten-year period of conceptualism see B. H. D. Buchloh, "From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique [Some Aspects of Conceptual Art 1962-1969]," in *L'art conceptuel, une perspective: 22 Novembre 1989–18 février 1990*, (Paris: Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1990), 41.

of the art market, the artists themselves announced the return to the "thing."

The objects made by Monastyrsky for the action *Discussion* were called "Categories of KD." They were placed on the white cloth in order to recreate a miniature replica of one of KD's out-of-town actions. The white cloth, which was spread on the floor and under the objects, and around whose perimeter were seated the spectators and the artists, was there in order to suggest the white snowy field that was traditionally part of KD's actions. The entire atmosphere that was created for this action suggested that KD had tried to scale down the objective elements of its demonstrative field (the white field and the gray skies) in order to "fit" them inside the small Moscow apartment. Each of these objects stood for an element often employed by KD in its actions, the only difference being that in KD's "genuine" out-of-town actions these elements took the form of abstract concepts, gestures, movements, actions, sounds, or elements as immaterial as the air over the village Kiev Gorky. For this action the demonstrative field itself, which according to its definition was the dynamic center of the action constituted by the totality of psychic (subjective) and empirical (objective) elements, was turned into a wooden board and placed in the middle of the room (FIGURE 6). The action of walking on Kievogorskoe Field had been made into a wooden plank called "Walking," and the impossibility of seeing anything on that field, which had so often been deployed to create various empty states of waiting and incomprehension, was turned into an object called "Imperceptibility." The concept of "Categories of KD" lists in its definition such actions, gestures, and states as walking, standing, lying in a pit, shouting, imperceptibility, and knocking.⁷⁰ The *Dictionary* defines the "Categories of KD" as a series of gestures and actions performed by the artists in order to construct the action in terms of one of the most important devices (*priem*) in the aesthetics of KD, called "The Demonstration of the

70 "Categories KD" [*Kategorii KD*]"—"a series of methods and devices often used by KD in order to construct the event, in terms of the "Demonstration of Demonstration" (e.g., walking, standing, lying in a pit, 'people in the distance,' moving along a straight line, 'imperceptibility,' light, sound, speech, group, repetitions, listening to The categories of KD may also be autonomous, for instance in the series of objects made by A. Monastyrsky for the action 'Discussion.'" See Monastyrsky, *Slovar' terminov moskovskoi kontseptual'noi shkoly*, 47.

Demonstration" (*Demonstratsia demonstratsii*).⁷¹ The objectification and hardening of which I speak above is most clearly perceived in this tendency to transform the actions, movements, sounds, and gestures previously performed by the artists in order to achieve various emotional states (in the ES—the emotional space) of their spectator-participants into a series of objects perceived, by and large, visually. This does not mean that KD ceased to perform or to use their “Categories KD” as actions, but rather that these actions had acquired an objective equivalent, a kind of totem, which stood for actions, gestures, and language, instead of for natural objects such as animals and plants. One must also notice that in this hardening of KD’s “empty” actions and in the crystallization of its primary immaterial elements into objects, documentation—or the factographical discourse—has played a major intermediary role. From the end of the third phase on the group’s actions began to be corseted in a structure consisting of rules, concepts, and names of previous actions, which all came to resemble the movement of certain figures in a game of chess.

THE NEW AESTHETIC ZONE AND THE *JOURNEYS* AS GENRE

These new trends, which I have described under the name of “objectification,” were not limited to the reactions of spectators on the demonstrative field of the action *Discussion*, or to KD’s new approach to the status of the object. A series of new impulses and ideas that appear here and there in the texts from this period provide sufficient hints to confirm the appearance of a tendency toward formulating new methodologies, as well as toward theorizing as an end in itself. For instance, this phase saw a clear tendency to methodically cut up previous actions into parts and stages, thereby revealing their essential structure. Monastyrsky writes that “the methodological schema of producing actions for the third volume remained the same: the initial notion (e.g., the title of the action *Appearance*)—the event (the action *Appearance*)—the discourse (interpretational texts)—the aesthetic notion (elements such as “appearance” that are used again later in other actions.)”⁷² Although he claimed that this schema was present

71 “The Demonstration of Demonstration” (*Demonstratsia demonstratsii*)—“the main device (*priem*) in KD’s aesthetics, during which a distancing takes place from the act of demonstration that allows it to become part of the content of the action.” Ibid., 143.

72 Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 221.

from the very first actions organized by the group, only during this third phase was this fact announced. This is the period in which a series of unconscious impulses and wishes became manifest, as if KD had begun to acquire an acute form of self-consciousness. Although the predisposition toward rationalization and theorization had been present from the very beginning in the practice of this group, during the third phase it took a more methodical and systematic character, manifest above all in the tendency to encompass the actions within a rational grid composed of rules, norms, concepts, and methods; it was also an effort to validate the work of the group as a tradition with a methodology at which the group had arrived by research and reflection. This attitude is confirmed by the introduction of such new expressions as "the aesthetics of KD," "the aesthetic object," and "the aesthetic zone" that appear here and there in Monastyrsky's foreword to the third volume. The emphasis on the "aesthetic" expresses above all Monastyrsky's intent to give these activities the character of a discipline.

The attempt to impose a code of aesthetic behavior on the group's artistic activities is carried further by other art historical terms that appear in this volume. Monastyrsky, for instance, insists that KD's "journeys outside the city" must now be regarded as a genre. He writes that "the super task of all the actions of the third volume was to activate the genre [of "journeys outside the city"] and to maintain a kind of aesthetic activity by negation."⁷³ By this he means that the artists must deny their spectators for a while the pleasure of traveling into the countryside, and hold them instead in Moscow so that the stuffy air of their domestic actions will hopefully evoke in the spectators, as I have already mentioned, a longing for KD's prior journeys. The domestic actions needed to provoke negative emotions in order that the "real" actions of KD, the ones held in the midst of nature on Kievogorskoe Field, would be in greater demand among the spectators. Monastyrsky thus insists that journeying into the countryside must become a necessity, as well as a medium of communication and artistic expression. It was in this sense that the journeys had to become a genre.

But a new genre also needs a theory and an aesthetics of its own. Monastyrsky's text "Stages and Stops" (*Peregony i stoianki*), which appears as a statement after the description of all the actions of the third volume, may be regarded as an attempt to provide such a theoretical framework for

73 Ibid., 221–22.

the new genre of art called “journey outside the city.” The definition that the *Dictionary* gives for the entry “Stages and Stops” is the following: “an aesthetics, in which are woven together elements of transportation and a religious aesthetics.”⁷⁴ Like many other definitions in *Dictionary* this one is not very clear. The text itself describes the world that opens up when one travels from one place to another.⁷⁵ Train stations, airports, subways, buses, trains, whistles, instructions on how to comport yourself in each kind of transportation, all kind of posters telling of arrival and departure, the uniforms of the transportation personnel (each having its own emblem with golden and silver wings, wheels or hammers and sickles) and so forth—all these Monastyrsky calls the realm of the “transportation aesthetics” (235). From describing the extensive transportation system in Russia, which accommodates the immense expanse of its territory, the author crosses to the notion of “spiritual journeying,” bringing in various spiritual and religious practices where the notion of “journey,” “path,” “ascent,” “advancement,” “attainment” has played a central part. “It is possible that the Russian people, who are scattered over the immense territory of their country and who are often forced to cover very long distances when they travel, are very sensitive to the ‘unhomelike’ atmosphere of life, to their ‘guest status’ on earth, which is often expressed in all kind of parties and binges.”⁷⁶ What follows in this text resembles a piece of absurdist writing in which the author establishes parallels between the Soviet transportation industry, some concepts and ideas from the Russian Orthodox Church, Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism, and Sufism and the work of KD. The author also discusses his idea of order, specifically the kind that is so important for the proper functioning of the transportation industry.

In transportation aesthetics, as in the world of transport in general, any improvisation is strictly forbidden: trains must run on time, the chugging of the wheels must follow a certain pattern (otherwise something in the mechanism is broken), the whistles must also follow a pattern in order to be recognized as signals, and the shoulder straps show who is who in the transport hierarchy of this enormous transport system.⁷⁷

74 Monastyrsky, *Slovar' terminov moskovskoi kontseptual'noi shkoly*, 152.

75 Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 234–9.

76 Ibid., 235.

77 Ibid., 236.

These examples from the world of transportation, and this tone of the “call to order,” sound like an attempt to justify a series of moves that occurred during the third phase—namely, the accordance of a special aesthetic status to the object by turning it into an artifact; the declaration of a new artistic genre called “journeys outside the city”; and the creation of a separate and self-sufficient “aesthetics of KD” that can account for these two innovations. Unlike the previous two phases, when the character of their actions seemed more arbitrary and open, in this phase KD closes up zones and sets up rules and concepts. It is not accidental that most of the concepts included in the *Dictionary* date from the mid-eighties on. I do not wish to suggest that KD’s experience is unique in this regard and that the artists (or Monastyrsky, whose figure became more and more authoritative) did this purposefully. KD’s experience in fact follows a certain mysterious rule, which many cultural phenomena tend to abide by. KD’s example evokes numerous historical precedents, and it may indeed be helpful to address certain processes that followed a similar path. The state in which KD found itself in its third phase recalls the emergence (in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries) of the very institution of art—the emergence of art, over a fifty-year span, as an autonomous bourgeois institution with its own genres and its own dual science of “aesthetics” and “art history,” disciplines established in order to distinguish certain artifacts and objects from others.⁷⁸ This is also the history of the historical avant-garde, which in the USSR was gradually mummified into the doctrine of Socialist Realism and on the other side of the Atlantic became, after World War II, a highly commercialized system known today as the “art world.”

In KD’s case the shift toward a more formal approach in the making of its actions had been signaled already at the beginning of the second phase by the new representational layer called the factographical discourse. While documenting the action became more important than the action itself, this shift led to some of the changes discussed above, including the objectification of the actions, gestures, spectators, the appearance of “KD’s aesthetics” and of the art genre of “journeying outside the city.” But the factographical discourse that emerged with the first action of the second phase (*Ten Appearances*) made possible another important shift, a change that would be fully perceived only a decade later. In an interview that served

78 For a relevant source for this topic see Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

as the foreword to the unpublished sixth volume of *Journeys* (1991–94), Monastyrsky announced that it was precisely in the third phase that KD's discourse shifted toward postmodernism. He explained that if the first and the second volumes of *Journeys* were created as documents and records of actions—and as such were secondary to the actions themselves—then from the third phase on the action became secondary to the document.

In the third volume a “perversion” took place: it is as if we had first planned the third volume, and then started to make actions for it. ...In fact such a turn of events was already predetermined in the foreword to the second volume, where factographia [“factographical discourse”] were announced as part of the “demonstrative field.” The realization of this layer was made in the format of the book, which became primary with regard to the event.⁷⁹

Monastyrsky sees the emergence of KD's postmodernism in the shift from the primacy of the action to that of the text; that is to say, when the text or the document, which used to serve the actions, stepped forward as the sole pretext for the next action.

Did the factographical discourse signal the passage into a new cultural period, or should it be itself regarded as a result of those changes that took place in this phase (the status of the object, the emergence of KD's method, aesthetics, and genre)? When, in the previous sections, I spoke of the three phases that lasted from 1976 to 1985, I made a clear distinction between a “phase” and a “volume.” A phase is a temporal segment in KD's history and a volume is the collection of documents in which the groups' activities arranged into separate dossiers are recorded. With the assertion that from 1983 the actions are secondary to the book (the action “documents” the text and not vice versa), the volume becomes more significant than the phase; the term “volume” appears to take over from the term “phase”; and from the next section on I will discuss KD's subsequent stages by referring only to volumes of documents, as does Monastyrsky, who for the record has never been very clear about the distinction between the two.

79 Interview between Sabine Hängsen and A. Monastyrsky in Volume Six. Monastyrsky, “Poezdki za gorod: 6–10 vols.” [unpaginated].

VOLUMES IV (PHASE 1985–87) AND VOLUME V (1987–89)

With the movement toward the fourth and the fifth volumes, KD emerged in the second half of the eighties as an established cultural phenomenon of the Moscow unofficial scene. By the mid-eighties the group had organized thirty-nine actions, during which the artists had cultivated their own elite public and had instituted their customs and rituals, their stylistic principles and rules—in a word, they had established a tradition with its own aesthetics and its own method of making and defining the nature of art. Journeying to the countryside in order to participate in the rituals on Kievogorskoe Field had become by 1985 a matter of prestige, especially among a younger generation of artists. There were in particular some non-Muscovites who toured from Odessa in order at first to become spectator-participants, and later to emerge as the Medical Hermeneutics group that carried on the project of Moscow Conceptualism. By the mid-eighties KD was an established community and even a school that inspired and instructed new generations of followers.

In this section I examine both the fourth and the fifth volumes of *Journeys*. The reason for combining these two volumes is that the fourth part was not a full-fledged volume but an addition, as suggested by its subtitle, “Additional Material to the *Journeys Outside the City*.” This volume, which documents and interprets the works made during the years 1985–87, indicates that the fourth volume represents the least active stage in the entire “before 1989” period. There were only eight actions (in contrast to fifteen, eleven, and fourteen in the previous phases), four of them taking place without any spectators.⁸⁰ Although each volume of the *Journeys* also has a section that comprises photographs of actions from each phase, it is only the fourth volume that lacks this photographic section, and the few photographs that document actions organized between 1985 and 1987 are distributed in the photographic sections of the third and the fifth volumes. In addition, half of this volume is occupied by Monastyrsky’s autobiographical novel “Kashirskoe Road” (*Kashirskoe shosse*)—a text where the author retells the story of his going mad in 1981 after he finished the action *Ten Appearances*. The text is regarded as one of the first examples of Russian psychedelic literature, and is also considered to be a point of origin for Moscow Psychedelic Conceptualism.⁸¹

80 Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 781.

81 For Moscow Psychedelic Conceptualism, see the Appendix.

The fourth and the fifth volumes include material from 1985 until 1989. During these four years KD worked within the same group, adding only in 1987 its eighth member—the German cultural historian Sabine Hänsen. These two phases of KD took place with Perestroika in the background. In 1985 the newly elected general secretary Mikhail Gorbachev launched a series of far-reaching political, economic and social processes, and the entire USSR was living out, very fully in fact, its final years of existence. These dramatic years of Perestroika brought the USSR to its end and also affected KD. The following paragraphs examine some of the most radical changes that took place during this time, suggesting, in the first part of this section, that by the beginning of the fourth volume KD had managed to establish its own form of discourse, a very hermetic system modeled on the patterns of the Soviet totalitarian and ideological text. The second part of this section describes the ways in which the radical political and social transformations taking place under the banner of Perestroika also affected the principles on which KD's closed discourse was built, leading to the dissolution of the group in 1989.

THE TOTALITARIAN DISCOURSE: KABAKOV'S "TEXT"

By the mid-eighties the group had constructed a system to which Monastyrsky sometimes refers using the phrase: "the totalitarian space of KD,"⁸² and indeed it was becoming increasingly popular to openly use the word "totalitarian." With the changing socio-political context the vocabulary of the conceptualists acquired a range of new concepts. One of them is "inciters" (*inspiratory*), which the *Dictionary* defines as "objects (or processes) on the exposition semiotic field that bring forward new motivational contexts in aesthetic activity."⁸³ An example of an "inciter" in KD's aesthetic discourse might be an avenue, a monument complex, a building, or any other imposing structure that projects totalitarian politics through the discourse of architecture. If an action takes place around one of these "inciters" then the structure incites new motivations and affects the context of the action; it is as if the "inciter" contaminates the work

⁸² Ibid., 673.

⁸³ Monastyrsky, *Slovar' terminov moskovskoi kontseptual'noi shkoly*, 45. See Appendix for complete definition.

with its presence. An “inciter” is something too grand to be ignored, something that hovers over the exposition field of the action, dominating and controlling it, entrapping everything around it in its totalitarian nets.

I have hinted earlier that KD did not treat Soviet ideology in the same way as did other Moscow unofficial artists. For instance such Sots artists as Komar & Melamid or Alexander Kosolapov revealed their hostile attitude to the Soviet system by making an art that attempted to discredit the system and to expose the hypocrisy of the Party. They painted numerous humorous pictures of Stalin and the muses, or of Lenin advertising for Coca-Cola, and their artistic approach, which sought to expose the cult of personality in a new and more convincing way, may be described as an integration of the method of strong civic opposition used by the modernists of the sixties (*shestidesyatniki*) with the ironic and flamboyantly detached attitude of Western Pop Art. The attitude of those, who like KD, belonged to the so-called “Kabakov circle” was different.

Over the years Kabakov has many times declared his disengagement from politics, and in so doing he expressed a position shared by many in his circle of followers.

Kabakov has always styled himself a coward. He has consistently refused to take part in explicit political activities organized by other artists. He would come to watch and stand in the crowd, but he would always shrug his shoulders if anyone asked him why he didn't join in. “I'm just an ordinary frightened Soviet man,” he would say. “I'm afraid even to walk in the streets. Don't ask me to be a hero.”⁸⁴

In the early seventies Kabakov made a series of “empty” paintings and drawings. Later he explained that he had arrived at this method of representation intuitively—out of a certain fear of the center, as in the warning: “Don't get into the center, you might get smashed.”⁸⁵ This “fear of the center” was what many of the “romantic” conceptualists had in common, and it was also what made them different from the historical avant-garde to whom they began to compare themselves in the nineties. I would like to pause here, and make a quick comparison between the

84 Solomon, *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost*, 78.

85 Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 544.

Moscow Conceptualists' notion of emptiness and that of the Russian historical avant-garde, which, as suggested in the previous chapter, is more appropriately called "nothingness."

Compared to Malevich, whose Suprematist language made a radical demand on the center of the canvas, Kabakov's characters gather at the margins, near the frame of the album in the same manner in which KD artists and guests escape into the quiet, idyllic, all white "out-of-town-ness" of the Moscow region. In Malevich's *Black Square*, but also in his monochrome series *White on White* [1918], the square per se is divided from the frame by a painted matte border. Every artist and professional picture shop framer knows that a matte border is added to the picture in order to accentuate it, and to facilitate and direct the eye's attention toward the center of the picture. Malevich's emptiness is full; it is a potentiality that scattered into multiple fragments that soon were arranged within the new revolutionary language of Suprematism. In Kabakov the center is deserted. Left empty, it is being observed from the surface of the matte border by various characters he invented for this series. Kabakov maintained that Malevich's *Black Square* dragged him into a certain depth that he perceived as violence. "I did not give my permission for this violence!"⁸⁶ Kabakov may well have been right that at the "center" (in Moscow) the unofficial artists could have all been crushed. His distrust and suspicion of political activism and his refusal to make his art a vehicle for expressing political beliefs was also transmitted to many within the younger generations of Moscow conceptualists. KD and Medical Hermeneutics, for instance, followed similar steps, avoiding explicit references to political or social issues, sublimating instead their desires and opinions into mystifying and baffling mythologies and rituals. Viktor Tupitsyn has called KD's actions "escapes into silence," but this silence, like that of John Cage, one of the greatest foreign influences for the group, was not mute.

KD's countryside performances in the seventies were in a certain sense "escapes into silence." And yet I always wanted to understand why in their work I always hear voices and speeches.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Kabakov et al., *Dialogi: 1990–1994*, 64.

⁸⁷ Tupitsyn and Kabakov, *Glaznoe iabloko razdora: besedy s Il'ei Kabakovym*. 24.

The reason Tupitsyn “heard voices” has to do with the way in which KD builds its discourse.

KD’s subversive, or nonconformist, artistic actions may have resided in something else, in something that is sometimes hinted at but has never been fully stated or clearly explained. Its artistic originality may be found in the degree to which KD tried to construct a self-enclosed aesthetic system that resembled the Soviet ideological apparatus. To follow a line of interpretation increasingly popular over the last decade within criticism of postsocialist art, one might say that KD attempted to identify itself with the totalitarian system; instead of attacking or making jokes and puns about its absurdity it tried—unconsciously perhaps—to *become* it; to mimic its totalitarian discourse. Monastyrsky has even recently claimed that one of the models that had inspired him was the highly totalitarian version of North Korean communism.⁸⁸ Other artists and critics use the adjective “total,” which is central in its importance for Moscow Conceptualism. In the early eighties Natalya Abalakova and Anatoly Zhigalov worked on a project called “Tot-Art,” in which they investigated the effect of the “total artistic action,” and ten years later Kabakov introduced the term “total installation” to describe an artwork that includes the spectator within itself. More recently in 2007, Groys described the social effect of Moscow Conceptualism using the expression “total enlightenment.”⁸⁹

KD’s attempts to artistically replicate a totalitarian environment may of course be interpreted in terms of its conscious or unconscious self-identification with authoritarian ideology. This notion of liberation through identification has become somewhat popular over the past decades, especially within those intellectual circles that draw upon psychoanalytical methods. Slavoj Žižek, for example, has articulated the idea of self-identification with repressive power in his writing on the Slovenian band Laibach. Against Peter Sloterdijk’s assertion that Western cynical reason helps to keep an ironic distance from the intrusive pervasiveness of modern ideology, Žižek argues that ideology is already ironic, and already distanced

88 Andrei Monastyrsky mentioned North Korean communism in an interview with the author. Moscow, Russia, July 24, 2004.

89 For “Tot-Art” see Natalya Abalakova and Anatolii Zhigalov, *Totart: russkaia ruletka* (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1999). For “total enlightenment” see Groys’s foreword in Groys et al., *Die totale Aufklärung: Moskauer Konzeptkunst 1960–1990*.

from itself.⁹⁰ Ideology does not believe in its own premises; a cynical principle is inscribed already within its mechanism, helping it to anticipate and annihilate any potential critique. For Žižek, the only way to resist the pressure of ideology is to adopt a strategy that has evolved within Lacanian branches of psychoanalysis. In an “over-identification with the symptom,” ideology must be treated in the same way as a neurotic symptom: instead of avoiding it—enjoy it! Easier said than done.

If one applies such a reading to Moscow Conceptualism then it would be safe to say that of all conceptualists KD was the most persistent in over-identifying itself with the totalitarian symptom. But they did not carry out this process of identification in a showy, theatrical way, as does Laibach, but on the more undramatic level of their “empty” actions, and above all, in their texts. Text has been one of the main concerns and models for the Moscow conceptualists, and the way in which these artists understood and treated it was shaped, in many respects, by Kabakov’s work and thinking. Kabakov’s speculations on the importance of text for this group of unofficial artists are part of his broader theory of emptiness, as discussed previously, in Part I. By the early eighties, Kabakov insisted that text constituted his main material, as well as that of his conceptualist friends. Although the word “conceptual” seems to self-evidently invoke the text as primary artistic material, Kabakov’s theory of text is more complex than might at first appear, involving a speculation on the importance of self-referential and ready-made text for this circle of artists.

Kabakov describes how dramatically the ideological language of the Soviet Party changed over the first three decades after World War II. He points out that, if during the decades of Stalin and Khrushchev (the fifties and sixties) Soviet ideological paraphernalia (posters, stands, and panels) were “loaded with ideological powder, and they literally were shooting at us with calls to accomplish great things, then toward the end of the seventies they ceased to shoot and only stood around us as a formidable weaponry.”⁹¹ Those signals of power that before had terrorized every Soviet citizen with

90 On cynical reason see Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*; v. 40 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). For Žižek’s views on ideology see Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Phronesis (London; New York: Verso, 1989), and “The Enlightenment of Laibach” in Inke Arns, *Irwin: Retroprincip 1983–2003* (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, Archiv für aktuelle Kunst, 2003).

91 Kabakov, *60-e – 70-e: zapiski o neofitsial’noi zhizni v Moskve*, 115. I

agitated revolutionary messages now began to appear as relics of the past, as old weapons which once could kill but now only threaten. Likewise, in the eighties the posters, the slogans, the banners, in short all the visual agitation once introduced and perfected by the historical avant-garde, lost its function and was reduced to decoration for the Soviet public space. As in his theory of emptiness, Kabakov draws a parallel with the West and states that if, in capitalism, the advertising billboards still correspond to a product that consumers might find on the shelves of the supermarket, then in the Soviet Union:

... posters, stands, slogans, banners, indications, timetables, and schedules do not correspond to anything in reality. These are clean, self-referential objects that contain utterances which do not refer to any known thing. These are TEXTS in the full sense of this word. These are TEXTS which everybody knows do not refer to anything, do not mean anything, are not meant to correspond to anything in particular; and yet, these texts are still very important "in themselves," and the interest, the attention, the "work" with these texts is one of our main concerns for us. (116)

By "us" Kabakov meant the artists of his circle, to whom KD also belonged, and who had developed this theory of the self-sufficiency of the ideological text into a complete model. Interest in the nature of the totalitarian text was central to the tradition of Moscow Conceptualism.

"Our texts," Kabakov stressed, "*are directed only to texts*, and each text is text that embraces a previous text. In this regard we have a true Wittgensteinian hermeneutics—as if we all live within one Text."⁹² What Kabakov has described (using the capital letter "T") as self-referential text is what he also considers to be the greatest contribution of the Moscow conceptualists to contemporary art. But the Text of which Kabakov speaks is not simply self-referential but also a *ready-made* text. If, in the West, Duchamp introduced the idea of using ready-made objects instead of works of art, thus raising the question of what, in the realm of objects, constitutes art and what does not, Moscow conceptualists introduced into their art textual ready-mades, extending this question into the field of language. It is not entirely clear what Kabakov regards as the Moscow

conceptualists' contribution to art, but he seems to suggest that they, and above all he himself, had introduced into art the self-referential and ready-made language mined from the terrain of Soviet ideology. If Duchamp's ready-made refers only to the object, then the Moscow conceptualists use of the ready-made text raises the question of what distinguishes an artistic from a nonartistic text.

Western conceptualists also used ready-made language but their language, Kabakov suggests, had once had its referent in something existing in the real world such as an object, product, or commercial good. The Muscovites, on the other hand, drew their texts from Soviet Union posters, slogans, banners, and communal apartments' announcement boards that most of the time did not refer to objects or goods—these were in shortage in the USSR—but to abstract ideological concepts. For instance, Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (1965) addresses three hypostases of the object "chair," whereas Bulatov's 1975 *Glory to the CPSU*⁹³ (where the text "Glory to CPSU" is written on the background of the sky) does not refer to an object but to an acronym and a name of the party. In other words the idea behind the Moscow conceptualists' readymade texts is that the frozen language of political propaganda had been lying dead in the streets, and that these artists had picked it up and carried it into their studios in order to integrate it into their work. It is here that one traces another interesting encounter between the Moscow Conceptualists and the historical Russian avant-garde, for the former were basically trying to give a new life to what the latter had invented half a century earlier—the radical language of agitprop developed for the education of the masses, which over seventy years had become the lifeless wooden language of Soviet bureaucracy.

Although Moscow conceptualists claim that they introduced ready-made language into contemporary art, I will neither affirm nor deny this claim nor question Kabakov's belief in the fact that in the West everything written on billboards had a material equivalent. As far as the language of the Soviet Communist Party is concerned this may be true, for indeed many artists have used it as their primary artistic material. But such an approach corresponds more to the first generation of conceptualists who, like Kabakov, Bulatov, or Vasiliev, used the party's wooden language as it was spoken by Brezhnev, or as it was found publicly displayed. The next

generation of conceptualists did not simply work with text—it worked to become text. This is particularly relevant for KD artists, who performed, documented, recorded, discussed, and then transcribed it all into endless text. Moreover, the text that was collected and assembled in the *Journeys* became a self-referential system whose closed hermeticism could be successfully compared to the program and the jargon of the party. KD's world is that of a closed system, which works very much like the party's ideology department—a bundle of signs that do not refer to anything concrete or real outside but only to other signs within the same system. KD's terminology is a good example of this self-referentiality. Many of the terms published in the *Dictionary* seldom refer to anything that one may encounter outside of Moscow Conceptualism or of KD's circle. Instead they point to one another in a circular way and only to what exists within that ground that they have brought forward and agreed to accept.

But KD's model did not resemble from the beginning such a closed textual system. This closed circularity developed gradually over the years together with the group's theories about the text. The shift toward textuality and documentation is well reflected in the ways in which KD referred to its work throughout the period before 1989. In the first years of their collaboration the artists described their works using such theatrical terms as “production,” “staging” (*postanovka*), and “performance,” or referring to them in terms of “thing” (*vesch'*) or “work” (*rabota*).⁹⁴ After the appearance of critical texts in the foreign art press, and especially after Groys's essay in *A-Ya*, the group adopted the category “action.” Toward the mid-eighties, after the shift to postmodernism, KD's artists began to call their works “text.” Some of their terms reflect this shift. For instance, the concept of “demonstrative field” was defined in the foreword to the first phase as the dynamic center of the *action* constituted by the totality of psychic (subjective) and empirical (objective) fields.⁹⁵ In 1987 Monastyrsky redefined this concept to mean a series of “elements included in the construction of the *text*.”⁹⁶ For almost a decade the group had been searching for the right word to express what it was doing and finally solved this problem by redefining performances and actions as texts, or as object-texts.

94 See Kordiashvili in Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 203.

95 Ibid., 22–23.

96 The redefinition took place in the “A. M. Earth Works” [*A. M. Zemlianye raboty*]. See Monastyrsky, *Slovar' terminov moskovskoi kontseptual'noi shkoly*, 37–8. (italics mine).

The object-text became KD's *Journeys*, which from the third phase on was the most important aspect of their work. This collection of texts and documents is the perfect illustration of the group's self-referential system, where all elements are turned back on each other: concepts refer to concepts, new actions refer to previous ones, and Monastyrsky's sealed texts always refer back to other equally hermetic pieces of earlier writings. It is like a mysterious alphabet spoken only by a few who know the unspoken laws of combining its symbols. The above diagram called "The Arrangement of the Spectators on Kievogorskoe Field" (FIGURE 7) was made for the fifth volume, and it illustrates this textual self-referentiality constructed by KD. The diagram is a map of Kievogorskoe Field. The seventeen numbers enclosed in circles, polygons, and squares stand for various actions organized since the seventies on this meadow near the village Kievy Gorky. For instance, the snowflakelike number 5 in the center of the field shows the point from where ten spectator-participants moved in the direction of the woods unreeling their bobbins as the KD artists had required them to do in 1981 for the action *Ten Appearances*. This map, drawn by Monastyrsky, also indicates the place on the meadow where each of KD's seventeen actions took place, as well as the position and/or the movement of the spectator-participants during each of these actions (indicated by arrows).

But this map is also an illustration of KD's system at work. Monastyrsky writes in the foreword to the fifth volume that most of the actions described in this volume were secondary with regard to previous actions, and that "some of them are simply mental-topographical 'repetitions/continuations' of the earlier actions."⁹⁷ This strategy of repetition and continuation that KD has practiced since the seventies makes each new action of the group appear as an extension and perfection of the previous ones. From my position of observer-outsider I could even dare to say that there is often the impression that throughout its history the group has perpetuated and maintained one single action. Discussing "The Arrangement of the Spectators on Kievogorskoe Field," Monastyrsky suggests that each new action uses the "traces" of the previous works as benchmarks, and that the spectators in each action "move forward" from the position at which they ended the previous action.⁹⁸ Such an approach is reminiscent of Soviet ideology in that

⁹⁷ Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 673.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

for the latter, every new act or deed is a continuation of the original act of the October Revolution. But with the beginning of a series of political and social reforms in the USSR, KD's closed discourse also began to change.

DEPRESSURIZATION OF THE TOTALITARIAN DISCOURSE: THE GAP BETWEEN ART AND LIFE

Thus far we have primarily followed changes that occurred on the artistic or aesthetic level of KD's self-enclosed system: the subsequent and gradual transformation of purely meditative actions into texts, documents (factographical discourse) and objects. With the advance of Perestroika there appear other noticeable changes on the pages of the Soviet *Journeys Outside the City*, changes that fall more within the domain of the social and political rather than that of aesthetics. KD begins to open itself up towards the world.

In the mid-eighties began a process of "depressurization," to employ a word used by Monastyrsky to describe one of the main tasks of the fifth volume.⁹⁹ The text-based self-sufficient system KD had assembled for a decade began to open up. This change is betrayed by new words indicating a series of new concepts that appear in the texts of the fourth and fifth volumes. What the previously mentioned term "inciters" has in common with such new concepts as "Peasants in the City" (*Krestiane v gorode*) and "Cosmonauts, Titans, Fire-bars, Runts, and Georgians" (*Kosmonavty, titany, kolosniki, korotyshki, Gruziny*) is not only that fact that they all emerged during the first years of Perestroika (1985–87), but also that these new designations have social, political, and economic referents. These terms denote things and concepts from the political and economic sphere that had not previously been part of KD's zone of interest. The phrase "peasants in the city," for instance, refers to the large "nomadic masses of peasants that flooded the Soviet cities after the enforced mass collectivization of the thirties."¹⁰⁰ Monastyrsky mentions this Stalinist project and how drastically it had changed the economic and cultural life of Moscow. This shift toward the social, the political, and the historical is one of the most visible changes that occurred during this period. These new terms, upon

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Monastyrsky, *Slovar' terminov moskovskoi kontseptual'noi shkoly*, 55. See the extended definition in the Appendix.

entering KD's discourse, dilute its closed self-referential posture with comments on the outside world. This process resembles in many respects the effect of Perestroika and glasnost on millions of Soviet citizens, who all of a sudden discovered an interest in the political, assuming new social, civic and economic roles, as they began to comment on or engage in those changes that were taking place outside the walls of their apartments.

One of the first texts in which this depressurization of KD's discourse takes place is "With a Wheel in the Head: Remarks on Sociology, Art, and Aesthetics." This text was actually part of the third volume, and was prepared by Monastyrsky to be read for the action *Voices (Golosa)* in 1985.¹⁰¹ It is one of the first texts in the *Journeys* in which the author seeks to place the KD phenomenon within a broader historical context. Here Monastyrsky names the predecessors, mentions the key historical events within the unofficial art scene, lists major samizdat publications, remembers important political actions, refers to KD's most political and most widely known work (*Banner*, printed in *Flash Art* magazine), and finally suggests that "a 'private' aesthetic historicism" had come to replace the broader "social historicism" of the previous decades.¹⁰² "'Private' social historicism," on the other hand, is what Monastyrsky suggests is the attitude of such artists as Kabakov and Bulatov, who chose to rely on their own resources and aesthetic projects instead of joining in with the "social historicism" of those associated with the Lianozovo Group or of those dissidents who had organized the Bulldozers Exhibition in 1974. A new, sociopolitical vocabulary begins to make its mark in the fourth volume, and especially in the fifth, of KD's texts. Monastyrsky writes about ideology, socioeconomic systems, about Stalin and his wife Svetlana Allilueva, about the Cold War and modernism. He generates texts in which he presents the tradition of Moscow Conceptualism using as a metaphor various departments of the Moscow Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy (VDNKh).¹⁰³ At this point Soviet history in its broader movements (economy, agriculture) enters into the discourse of the group. It is the beginning of depressurization of the hitherto closed textuality of KD, and its turn toward the world, toward society.

101 See "A.M. S kolesom v golove: Zamechanie o sotsiologii, iskusstve i estetike," in Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod*: 1–5 vols., 292–99.

102 Ibid., 299.

103 See "A.M. Rechnye zavodi sovetskoi kharizmy: kratkii shizoanaliz istorii 'Kollektivnykh deistvii,'" Ibid., 552.

Before Perestroika, references to politics and society were almost missing from the texts of Monastyrsky and of other participants in KD's meetings. As I have already suggested, the group was uninterested in producing art that carried an explicit political or social message. It may be useful to make a quick comparison between the Moscow "Collective Actions" and a group of artists that were called by the same name. The Santiago de Chile-based CADA (*Colectivo de Acciones de Arte* or Art Actions Collective) is a group of artists that emerged in the early 1970s as part of the Chilean *Avanzada*. CADA organized numerous actions and performances denouncing poverty, hunger, and other economic deprivations brought on by the promarket rightwing military regime of general Augusto Pinochet.¹⁰⁴ While CADA was organizing collective actions with unambiguous and clearly stated political messages, in Moscow around the same time local unofficial artists were mocking all that was associated with leftwing politics and art. In his memoirs, for instance, Kabakov writes of the studio exhibition of Sots artist Leonid Sokov. In 1975 artists from Moscow "were shaking with laughter" in front of an installation entitled *The Restless Heart of Luis Corvalan*.¹⁰⁵ This work by Sokov, which consisted of a Plexiglas heart and a pump that pumped red paint through two hoses, was a mocking reference to the Chilean communist leader Luis Corvalan, who was at that time living in exile in the USSR. Whereas the Chilean CADA journeyed to the outskirts of Santiago to distribute powdered milk in the city's poorest suburbs, the Moscow KD journeyed to the outskirts of Moscow to explore the nature of art. The two forms of "collective actions" were vectored in opposite directions; the groups' aesthetic, political, and social agendas were at opposite poles. Of course, part of the hermetic aestheticism and of "art for art's sake" escapism favored within certain wings of Moscow Conceptualism can be and has been understood as a mechanism of self-defense against the repressive nature of the socialist state. One must not totally disregard this division into the artistic and social, however, especially when it comes to positioning this art and aesthetics within a wider cultural and historical context, or comparing it to other generations of artists or to the historical Russian avant-garde, which the conceptualists have done on numerous occasions.

104 Coco Fusco, *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000).

105 Kabakov, *60-e – 70-e: zapiski o neofitsial'noi zhizni v Moskve*, 76.

Two aesthetic comportments based on opposed political attitudes, often expressed through the opposition “art for art’s sake” versus “art for life’s sake,” have often been used (especially in the Western cultural context) to critically distinguish among various artistic positions. In the Soviet Union, however, this distinction was not very popular. In official art critical discourse the division fell along the lines of Socialist Realism versus “bourgeois decadent formalism,” though the terms “private art” and “social art” were used within certain hermetic circles of unofficial Muscovite artists and poets. In the foreword to the fourth volume of the *Journeys* Monastyrsky seeks to situate KD on this field divided between “art for art’s sake” and “art for life’s sake,” as if pressured by the events taking place behind the Kremlin walls and in the streets. He introduces this topic by referring to Rauschenberg’s infamous claim to be “acting in the gap between art and life.”¹⁰⁶ As it is well known, Rauschenberg refused to situate his art in either art or life, opting instead for optimistic delight and the search for new sensibilities found somewhere in the gap between them—a position of postwar American Neo-Dada that has been sometimes seen as too affirmative, and as such completely opposed to the radical political negation of many within historical European Dada and in particular Weimar Dada.¹⁰⁷ But KD’s position is even more baffling, for Monastyrsky affirms that his group is positioned neither in life, nor in art, nor in the gap between the two. Here is what he writes:

Indeed, if we regard our actions... then we may discover that they are not at all constructed in that undetermined place between life and art, and they do not point at this indeterminacy [gap] as their object of representation. The macrometaphor of KD’s actions is not “indeterminacy” (*neopredelennost’*) but “aloofness” (*obosoblennost’*). Initially this aloofness is easier to determine negatively: the event of the

106 In the foreword to Volume Four, Monastyrsky mistakenly attributes this phrase to Allan Kaprow. See Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 449.

107 The phrases “sheer delight,” “new sensibilities,” and “optimistic affirmation” as applied to the work of Rauschenberg and other American Neo-Dadaists belong to the curator of the American pavilion at the 1964 Venice Biennale Alan Solomon. See Laurie J. Monahan, “Cultural Cartography: American Designs at the 1964 Venice Biennale,” in Serge Guilbaut ed., *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris and Montreal 1945–1964* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1990).

action takes place neither in the sphere of life nor in that of art, nor in the diffuse and undetermined zone that exists between them. The only way to determine it positively is in the dynamics of the work: the event of the action takes place within the common efforts of the authors and spectators, directed at the movement of the subject of perception from the demonstrative field (art) through the “zone of imperceptibility” into the zone of the absent-minded, everyday contemplation of life.¹⁰⁸

One cannot determine from this statement where to locate KD within the ideological terrain of twentieth-century art, but neither is this very important. One might say that Monastyrsky has deliberately chosen this ambiguity as if to mimic the vague and wooden language (*la langue de bois*) of Soviet totalitarian discourse, as he has hinted on several occasions after 1989. This deliberate vagueness has been part of KD’s aesthetic project from the very beginning, and it may be regarded as an aspect of the group’s fixation on “emptiness,” or of the general propensity toward esotericism that has long characterized this group and set it apart from other circles of Moscow conceptualists. One might find a similar refusal in such personages as Melville’s *Bartleby*, who prefers not to choose, or in Kafka’s hunger artist, who simply cannot find anything in this world that is worthy of choosing. What I find important is not KD’s initial ambivalence but what it was that finally made its artists speak of the choice they faced between art and life. What is it that finally made them position themselves politically, if indeed this was a position at all? Was it the effect of Perestroika and glasnost that “forced” them to choose and to define their social role and position in a changing society? This question is relevant for the entire scene of Moscow Conceptualism, which for the most part—of course with some exceptions—has fallen more on the side of aestheticism and autonomy rather than that of commitment.

Monastyrsky’s statement about the “gap between art and life” is one of the multiple examples of the ways in which social and political issues began to seep through into KD’s discourse, diluting it with concepts and terms from political economic and social theory, all of which appears to happen as if independently of artistic will. In the passage above, for instance, Monastyrsky suggests that the model of “art-gap-life” may be understood in terms of KD’s own tripartite theoretical schema: the “demonstrative

108 Ibid., 449–50.

field," the "zone of imperceptibility," and the "exposition field." But if in the previous volumes these fields and zones were kept separate from social and political issues, and defined only within the very closed field of KD's lexicography, with the advent of Perestroika they began also to denote broader social and political aspects.

If previously the concept of "demonstrative field" was defined as a series of elements deliberately included in the construction of the action, and the "exposition field" in terms of elements not deliberately included in the work, then in the fourth volume they are redefined using a new vocabulary.

The first thing that comes into view when one examines the nature of the "exposition field" is that unlike the "demonstrative field" (which includes paintings and textual commentaries) it belongs not to the artist but to the state. The "exposition field" may include such elements as: the walls of the apartments and studios, of the museums, factories, institutions (both the internal and external walls), the land belonging to the kolkhozes and sovkhozes, the roads, in a word everything, including the water and air—perhaps only fire belongs to nobody, for nowhere is it yet written that fire is the property of the state.¹⁰⁹

With the beginning of Perestroika, and as some of the earlier introduced terminology became redefined using social or political terms, this terminology became clearer as a result. The demonstrative field above, which had earlier been defined in a series of abstract categories (e.g., "the system of spatiotemporal elements intentionally included by the authors in the construction of the text") was now translated more simply as the artist and his or her work, whereas the concept of "exposition field" now stood for the context in which the artist works. In other words, the demonstrative field came to stand for the concept of "art" whereas the exposition field signified "life," and the two were now divided by the "zone of imperceptibility"—that is, by the "gap" of which Rauschenberg spoke.

This opening up toward society was also manifested in the new approach the group took toward its public. Monastyrsky writes that this part of the *Journeys* is dedicated to the "anonymous spectator," and that the fifth volume's main intention was the "depressurization of anonymity."¹¹⁰ The

109 Ibid., 543.

110 Ibid., 673.

“anonymous spectators,” as the second-least advantaged category of KD’s public, are those who accidentally come across one of the group’s works. If previously this category of spectators had been somewhat neglected, then in the foreword to the fifth volume Monastyrsky calls them “the most important structural element in the totalitarian aesthetic space of KD. (Many actions including a few from this volume were conceived specifically for the accidental anonymous spectator.)”¹¹¹ Should this statement be read as a turn toward ordinary everyday people and as a departure from the elite public of KD, who had begun gradually to disappear?

Toward the end of the fifth volume the tone of the reports written by KD’s spectator-participants also change. Before, the reports were more poetic in tone, for the guests had discussed the very personal matters of how the action had affected their impressions, perceptions, feelings, and thoughts. The reports written for the last volumes are more prosaic in tone. Here is one of Kabakov’s reports from 1987, where he remembers what he had been doing and thinking as he was walking toward Kievogorskoe Field.

We were discussing with Joseph all sorts of irrelevant and weird things. By the way, around that time I was very excited because there was an interview with Galerie de France, about money and this whole disgusting new situation that was interfering with life. I would even confess with sorrow that this atmosphere which dominates our life today, all these business talks about exhibitions and money and all other kinds of nonsense, has eclipsed and replaced those spiritual flights and all the exaltations that used to accompany our epoch, which is possibly gone forever.¹¹²

This is a short paragraph from the last report written by Kabakov for KD’s actions. Perestroika had drastically changed his life, resulting in a very busy schedule for him in his new role—that of officially representing Soviet unofficial art abroad. By the late eighties the situation had changed dramatically, and many artists who once attended KD’s actions had left the country temporarily or permanently. The event marking the birth of a new epoch was an art auction organized in the late eighties in Moscow.

111 Ibid., 673.

112 Ibid., 695.

The Sotheby's auction took place on July 7, 1988, and instantly became one of the major events in this period for both official and unofficial artists.¹¹³ In fact, the auction erased the lasting political distinction that had divided Soviet artists for almost half a century, and had redrawn the line of separation along economic interests, dividing the artists into those who could sell to the West and those who couldn't. The American writer Andrew Solomon, who at the time was in Moscow to report on the Sotheby's event, described the day after the auction: "There was a certain separation among the artists. Those who had done too well stood at a distance from the others."¹¹⁴ KD was not part of the auction because Sotheby's had decided not to sell anything but flat paintings. KD had planned the action *Painting Two* (*Vtoraia kartina*) for the days immediately following the auction, and many who attended that action felt that the impact of the auction had reached also into the countryside where KD traditionally worked.

It appeared as if the title of the action itself was suggestive of the Sotheby's event. The spectators, who met at the central train station to take the train, were discussing all the way to the field the exorbitant prices of paintings and how suddenly everything had changed. One might have heard, for example, the following words in the train car: "The situation has changed dramatically, and now our enemies are Zakharov, Volkov, and Kabakov, now they are the official artists and we must start again with a new Lianozovo Group."¹¹⁵

113 The 1988 Sotheby's auction in Moscow was one of the major artistic events of Perestroika. Sotheby's sold paintings by Soviet unofficial artists in a sum totaling £2,085,050 (as opposed to the original estimate of £796,800 to £1,068,400). For the local art scene the outcome of the auction came as a shock. The artists who sold received a 60% commission—unusually high for a Western auction house. The painting that established the record was the *Fundamental Lexicon* (1986) by the Moscow painter Grisha Bruskin. The Soviet painters were sold in alphabetical order, and Bruskin's name was first on this list. In addition, his painting *Fundamental Lexicon* was depicted on the cover of the Sotheby's catalogue, and many have argued that it was precisely these facts that contributed to the record amount of £220,000 paid for this work in contrast to £17,000 as initially predicted. The auction launched twenty-nine Moscow artists into the orbit of the international art world. For more on this auction see Solomon, *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost*; Aleksandr Tikhonov, "Desiati' let spustia," http://www.nikofe.ru/nik/Desyt_let_spusty_sovetskii.html; and Faina Balachovskaia, "Dvadsat' let spustia," <http://www.gif.ru/themes/kunstbazar/sothebys-ruscont/20let/> [accessed July 5, 2009].

114 Solomon, *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost*, 34.

115 See Pivovarov's report in Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 720.

On the field the action *Painting Two* unfolded in the following way:

As the spectators were approaching the Kliaz'ma river in the Moscow region near the Nazarievo train station, Georgii Kizevalter (one of KD's first members) was waiting in the bushes on the river's opposite bank. When the spectators approached and sat on the grass in front of the river he appeared out of the bushes, took off his clothes, and lowered into the water a painting wrapped in cellophane. After then putting his clothes on the painting he began to swim toward the spectators, pushing the wrapped painting forward toward the bank they were on. When Kizevalter reached shore three other KD members took the painting from him and installed it on a slope between the spectators and the river. When KD removed the cellophane wrap the spectators saw an enlarged painted copy of the color slide "Ball in the Forest." The painting was instantly dismantled: the canvas was detached from the molding and rolled, and the canvas stretcher was disassembled to pieces. Seventeen (out of thirty) spectators received factographical material consisting of a black and white copy of that slide. In addition, long before the appearance of the spectators on the slope, a battery-powered electric bell had been installed.

July 10, 1988

NAZARIEVO, Moscow Region

A. Monastyrsky,

G. Kizevalter,

N. Panitkov,

E. Elagina,

I. Makarevich,

M. Chuikov,

Stefan Andre.¹¹⁶

By this point, Kabakov had left for the West, and the Russian philosopher Mikhail Ryklin had become one of the most active spectators in KD's "post-1989" period. In his report for this action Ryklin describes how the spectators all met at the station, the topics they discussed in the train car, and their walk to the river. Ryklin comments on "the Sotheby's heroes" and describes Backstein (or the "Backstein Function"), who was

leading an American film crew.¹¹⁷ The latter had come to film the action, but by the time they reached the site and began to install their heavy video equipment, the action was already finished.

The Americans with Backstein showed up when Kizevalter was already out of the water. By the time the American crew set up their equipment the artists were already taking apart the canvas stretcher. Then the film crew began to nervously record the public and the landscape. One of its members asked: "Who is this?" – "Monastyrsky." – "Damn, I knew it" (waving his hands hopelessly). They began to aggressively film Kizevalter, Makarevich, Panitkov, and Elagina [KD's members]. The event, which took place within the framework of the Sotheby's auction, was ruined, the efforts of the American film crew having gone to waste, and everyone was disappointed.¹¹⁸

After asserting that the action was part of the Sotheby's auction (which was inaccurate) Ryklin proceeds to describe his views on the action. His report for the action *Painting Two* differs from those submitted in the earlier phases in several respects. Previously the spectator-participants would describe their experiences from the position of the spectator; that is, staying focused and reporting only on what the artists did, how the action evolved, and what their experiences were. Unlike these earlier reports, which were written from the perspective of the spectator and his or her interaction with the artist, Ryklin's account is more disengaged. This distance makes the report read like a piece of art criticism or journalistic reportage, for Ryklin describes the interaction between the artists and the spectators (as well as the actions of the American film crew) from the detached position of an accidental observer, reporting from a bird's eye perspective. To him, KD's action and its public were one and the same with the gray and monotonous landscape; KD's demonstrative field remained invisible to him, to many new guests, and to the film crew. Ryklin also suggests that the ideal spectator for this action was neither the spectator-participant, nor the film crew, nor the select guests of the Sotheby's auction, but a fisherman, an angler who was lolling in his boat anchored not far away from KD's demonstrative field.

117 Ibid., 714–15.

118 Ibid., 715.

Actually that fisherman in his rubber boat was the ideal observer of the action because he was looking at the surface of the water, staring into space without resting his eyes on any particular object. . . . He was not reacting to the action, he was not even catching fish, but he stood still in his boat like an object that was observing itself.¹¹⁹

After this action Monastyrsky introduced into KD's vocabulary the new term "fisherman" (*rybak*), which the *Dictionary* defines as a "singular element of unknown origin in the system of the demonstrative and/or exposition semiotic fields."¹²⁰ This detached meditative state of the fisherman was that ideal empty state that KD had tried to induce in their spectator-participants during the first phase. Both the artists' commentaries and the participants' reports from that period often suggest that the final product of the action was a state of intense and immediate awareness in which the spectators were waiting, looking, and trying to understand what was unfolding in front of them, which most of the time was a matter of their observing themselves. It seems as if it was easier for KD to provide its guests with the necessary conditions for such a psychological state of emptiness. The group's empty actions invented for this aim, as well as the empty atmosphere of the field, were beneficial to such a collective form of meditation. In the first phase KD was to its spectators as fish were to the fisherman. Gradually, however, KD had ceased being interested in investigating the nature of art through the psychology of perception, and had moved forward toward documentary representation, inventing new tools, concepts, and techniques (the factographical discourse, the new status of the object, the invention of the genre of journeying with its own aesthetics, and so forth). This progress, as well as the new social and political conjuncture that made possible the appearance of Western collectors, curators, critics, and film crews, immersed KD deeper and deeper into the complex world of contemporary art, further distancing it from its initial search for the emptiest emptiness. In 1989 the group disbanded.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 715–16.

¹²⁰ "Fisherman" (*rybak*)—"singular element of unknown origins that has entered KD's system of demonstration/exposition fields. It was named after the fisherman who emerged on the demonstration field of the action 'Painting Two.' In other actions the element 'Fisherman' may become a car or a cyclist that passes." *Monastyrsky, Slovar' terminov moskovskoi kontseptual'noi shkoly*, 154–55.

"ACTION" VERSUS "ACTIVITY"—POLIS VERSUS SOCIETY

Before proceeding to discuss in more detail the effects of the post-Perestroika transition of the nineties, and the transformations that occurred during the after-period of KD, a concise summary of the before-period is in order, with an examination of the concept of "action." The latter has been at the center of the group's artistic endeavors since the mid-seventies, when KD adopted it in its collective name. Both the artists and their critics have regarded the notion of "empty action" as KD's know-how, as the group's major aesthetic device as well as its main contribution to contemporary art.

One way to begin a discussion of the international art produced during the second half of the last century would be to look at a split that took place within circles of artists, one that began to separate those artists who kept making art (painters and sculptors) from those who began to act, enact, or perform their art. These latter artists had followed their "conceptual," "body," "performance," "process" agendas (to name only a few) and headed toward what some critics have called the "dematerialization of art." By substituting acting for making, many of these artists had expressed their refusal to provide the public with an end product, or rather with a tangible end product that, they knew, would become another exchange commodity, or would be exploited for extra-artistic purposes. This shift from the making of art to its acting was conditioned by a myriad of factors at once cultural, political, economic, and social. In the West, the shift was determined by the rise of what has been variously termed "postindustrial," "postmodern," "contemporary," "mass," "affluent" or "consumer" society, to name only a few, and the new forms of artistic expression have often been regarded as reactions against a series of problematic issues within the new political, economic, and cultural order.

In the USSR, the turn from art making to art acting began in part under the influence of the new art and culture produced in the West, but also as the result of a series of radical structural changes that took place behind the Iron Curtain. Above I made several references to radical readjustments in Soviet ideological machinery during the sixth and seventh decades of the twentieth century. Yurchak has suggested that after the death of Stalin a "performative shift" took place in the mode of operation of the authoritarian

ideological discourse.¹²¹ His argument evolves around Austin's distinction between constative and performative utterances: a constative utterance states a fact that is either true or false (for example, "I am running"), while a performative utterance (for example, "I apologize") enacts what it states, and therefore is regarded as an action, or a speech act.¹²²

This difference between stating and acting, between making a statement and performing a speech act, has thus been used by scholars such as Yurchak to express the nature of those transformations that took place in the Soviet ideological discourse during the second half of the last century. Following the death of Stalin, the entire ideological machinery switched to a performative operational principle. It became completely irrelevant whether its ideological premises were true or false, or whether its goals or promises were achievable or not. For the sake of preserving the *status quo* the large apparatus of party workers (from the local to the highest levels) was engaged, on a daily basis, in endless recycling of ideological content, in a continuous reenactment of language rituals. Their work constituted, in fact, formal exercises in style, exercises whose main goal was not to produce, or to make new knowledge, but to seek instead new syntactic ways of restating already stated principles. The shift toward the performative dimension in ideological discourse was most clearly expressed on the textual level of Party documents, directives, editorials, or slogans. The endless rewritings and rearrangements of words led to the Party's infamous "wooden language," a language that most of the time did not convey anything; a language written only in order to be spoken, acted, or performed from a rostrum. In his discussions of the Politburo's "wooden language," Yurchak examines the following sentence: "The unebbing significance of the victory of the working class in the Great October Socialist Revolution [is] impossible to overestimate." The function of the verb in this sentence is minimal. The copula [is] is used only to link together strings of nouns and noun phrases that rephrase what has been already said

121 For a more detailed discussion of the "performative shift" see Chapter 1 in Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*.

122 On Austin's "constative-performative" distinction see John Austin et al., *How to Do Things with Words*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 47; John Austin, "Performative-Constative," in Susana Nuccetelli and Gary Seay, eds., *Philosophy of Language: The Central Topics* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

upon multiple occasions.¹²³ Multiple reiterations and rewritings lead to sentences like this one, flooded by nouns and in which the function of the verb is reduced to a minimum.

The objectification or, rather, the “wooden-ization” of this language is particularly manifest in one word, used to name those responsible for this style of writing. The word “activist” (*aktivist*) designated those who held key positions on various levels of the Party or Komsomol organizations, which were also called *aktivy*. “Activist” is what lexicographers call a “sovietism,” for it was coined in the early decades of Soviet Union—from which, in fact, it made its way into other languages.¹²⁴ The suffix “ist,” so widely employed in the last century, was added to designate a new position for those who were in charge of safeguarding the achievements of the Bolshevik Revolution, of the original sacred action. In the parlance of the late Soviet period the word “activist” was also used to form the opposition “activist-dissident”¹²⁵—a dichotomy in which the term to the left of the hyphen designated the active element of the socialist society, while the one to the right was reserved for the passive, detached, and solitary recluses who refused to participate in the construction of the common life. But some of these passive dissidents (from the Latin *dissidere*—to sit apart) were more reluctant to engage in collective activities and began, like KD, to organize actions (*deistvia*).

“Actions” must thus be distinguished from the “activities” of the Soviet activists. An action is a deed that not only presupposes an individual agent ready to assume responsibility for the act, but is also less determined or disciplined by a concrete goal or objective. Activities (*deiatel'nost'*) in contrast—and here I must stress that I am addressing these concepts only with respect to the Soviet context—are domesticated or tamed actions, and within the context of Soviet history most activities were regarded as consequences of one fundamental action, the Great October Socialist Revolution.

What distinguishes KD's actions (*deistvia*) from the preplanned and well-orchestrated “socially useful activities” (*obshchestvenno-poleznaia deiatel'nost'*) was their impulsive spontaneity. KD's “empty actions,” which

¹²³ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, 91.

¹²⁴ Shanskii, N. M., and A. F. Zhuravlev, *Etimologicheskii slovar' russkogo iazyka* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1963), 68–9.

¹²⁵ On the opposition “activist-dissident” see Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, 102–8.

stood for a series of unexpected and unplanned aesthetic gestures often barely noticeable to their spectator-participants, constituted—as harmless as they may have appeared—a form of dissent, especially compared to the activists’ “activities” understood as automatisms or routines associated with a job, an occupation, or a profession.

In order to fully understand this distinction between an “action” and an “activity,” as well as to better understand KD’s notion of action and its evolution during the Soviet period, I would draw briefly on Hannah Arendt’s theory of political action. Arendt’s discussion and elaboration of “action” and its implications for the human condition is well-suited to the work of KD, not least because it often draws so close to the field of aesthetics and art. As a detailed discussion of Arendt’s political theory is beyond the scope of this summary, in the next few paragraphs I provide only a short outline before returning to KD’s “actions” and “empty actions.”

Arendt designates action as one of the three fundamental human pursuits of *vita activa*; that is, of life devoted to public-political matters. Action (*praxis*), work (*poiēsis*), and labor (*ponein*)—these are the three essential human activities that determine “the basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to man.”¹²⁶ Of these three fundamental human activities,¹²⁷ action (*praxis*) is the only one that does not rely on a tangible intermediary, a thing, or any other material for its completion. Unlike labor and unlike work, action unfolds independently not only of any final tangible product but also of any explicit goal or aim. (Here labor is to be understood as the biological activity directed at providing for the necessities of life, for the human body—which is subject to basic vital necessities reclaimed from nature—and work as activity directed at the artificial, or unnatural world of human-made objects and things not readily available in nature.) Human action is capable of standing on its own without the support of a material end, something which is unimaginable for the processes of labor and work, both of which entail a final material result—be it food supply for the laboring man (*animal laborans*) or artifacts for workers and craftsmen (*homo faber*). What in Arendt’s view differentiates action from labor and work is its essentially noninstrumental character; that is, action reaches beyond an aim, goal, purpose, or tangible end product. Thus in the earlier

126 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959), 9.

127 Although I use Arendt’s word “activities” to discuss “action,” this should be distinguished from the Soviet “activities” (*deiatel’nost’*).

mentioned distinction between “actions” and Soviet “activities” the latter would qualify as labor, or work, performed by the activists engaged on a daily basis.

Action is always accompanied by speech. In fact, “speechless action would no longer be action because there would no longer be an actor, and the actor, the doer of deeds, is possible only if he is at the same time the speaker of words.”¹²⁸ In order for an action to qualify as such, it must have an agent, and it is the function of speech to reveal the agent or the actor of the action. The speech discloses the agent of the action, and this disclosure takes place within the inclusive togetherness of the community that the agent joins. It is also through speech that the acting agent asserts its identity within the community, for only a full and free immersion in the complex web of human togetherness enables the subject to reveal a more complete picture of the self. By escaping the limited realm of the private domain, of the household allocated to the processes of life sustenance, and by entering the public realm, the self becomes a “who,” an agent capable of taking responsibility for any action performed.

The interplay between action and speech, between deed and word, “produces” the story—the third important component of action. “Most words and deeds are *about* some worldly objective reality in addition to being a disclosure of the acting and speaking agent.”¹²⁹ The story is the inevitable result of the action, or rather, of the relation between an agent’s acting and speaking. Regarded within this relationship the story emerges as the immaterial outcome of action and speech, for the action is “no less a means to an end than making is a means to produce an object.”¹³⁰ One essential difference between action, on the one hand, and labor and work, on the other, is that the former does not “produce” its outcome (the story) purposefully, as is the case with the processes of fabrication. In other words, one does not act in order to “produce” a story in the way in which laborers and workers are deliberately and effectively directing their efforts at achieving a concrete material product. This essential distinction highlights the non-instrumental character of action.

In this way action—the most futile, least tangible, and most ephemeral of human endeavors—contributes to the realization of human plurality,

128 Ibid., 158.

129 Ibid., 162.

130 Ibid., 160.

facilitating the convocation of humans into communities, into the free public realm, whose ideal Arendt finds in the Periclean *polis* of ancient Athens. Of all three fundamental processes of the human condition, action appears as the most political, for its main outcome is the public or civic aspect of human life. The rigid separation of human activities into three distinct and autonomous spheres (action, labor, and work), as well as Arendt's insistence on the noninstrumental character of action, earned her many critics and supporters.¹³¹

Some of the criticism from political theorists concerns the political implications of action, and the belief that actions can in fact fulfill their identity-conferring and community-assembling tasks despite lacking a clear purpose. Arendt, however, insists on the unpredictable, risky, and contingent character of action, stressing that it is because of these properties that action holds the greatest promise for the realization of human freedom. There is a recognizable Nietzschean spring of thought that runs in the background of Arendt's theory of action, not only in the celebration of action, risk, and contingency and the clear disdain for matters of safety, comfort, or utility but, above all, in certain aesthetic qualities that are invested in the concept of action.¹³²

What confers meaning on an action is not its goal, purpose, or motive but the very act of performing it. Action regarded as revelatory expression of subjectivity, as self-contained disinterested *performance*, is what gives it value and meaning.¹³³ In *The Human Condition* Arendt constructs a theory of action that evokes Nietzschean aestheticism: the absolute spontaneity of the deed, the world-affirming glorification of the heroic act that alone is capable of reaching beyond good and evil, as well as the belief that only unpremeditated artistic acts, or only art is capable of withstanding modern rational instrumentality. In such later works as *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* Arendt turned to the disinterested aesthetic judgment of the third *Critique* in order to construct her theory of radical noninstrumental

131 On various criticisms of Arendt's political thought see James Knauer, "Motive and Goal in Hannah Arendt's Concept of Political Action," *American Political Science Review* 74, no. 3 (1980): 721–33, 732

132 For a more detailed discussion of the similarity between Arendt and Nietzsche, see *Ibid.*

133 For Arendt's "aestheticization of action" see Dana R Villa, "Beyond Good and Evil: Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action," *Political Theory* 20, no. 2 (1992): 274–308. (*italics mine*).

action.¹³⁴ In them she conceived of action in terms of a deed in which the disinterested and purposeless prevails over the political or economical, a position some critics have regarded as an equation of politics with performing art.¹³⁵

Arendt's aesthetization of the action, as well as her examination of action with regard to the constitutive role of speech and the story, can be read alongside the relation among various processes in KD's artistic practice. The interaction between action, speech, and story is at the core of this group's aesthetic and artistic program. In the context of the *Journeys* it becomes clear that these artists' actions cannot be isolated from their speech. Each of KD's actions was accompanied by speech manifested in the action's subsequently written descriptions and instructions, in the invitations and comments, in letters and telephone calls, and in verbal exchanges among artists and the spectator-participants. The *Journeys* itself was instituted in order to collect all the speech uttered before and during their actions. Viewed from Arendt's perspective, the *Journeys* is not only a conceptualist project that aims at substituting text for the fabrication of artistic objects, but it is above all a necessary and inevitable "byproduct" of the group's actions—something without which an action would not qualify as such.

But one should make a distinction, within the *Journeys*, between speech and story. Unlike speech, which manifests itself before or during the unfolding of the action, revealing the agent of the action, or the "who," the story emerges gradually, after the end of the action. Even though the story is the inevitable result of the action "it is not the actor but the storyteller who 'makes' the story."¹³⁶ In KD's case the storytellers were, in most cases, not the artists themselves but their spectator-participants, who submitted their stories, or written reports, long after the actions were completed; for the full meaning of an action can be revealed only when it has ended. The very practice of providing stories did not exist from the very beginning but was instituted years after KD's formation. The institution of the *Journeys* (five years after the initiation of KD) is also part of the process of the emergence of the "story," or rather, of the group's "history."

134 For a discussion of Arendt's turn to Kant's third Critique see Andrew Norris, "Arendt, Kant, and the Politics of Common Sense," *Polity* 29, no. 2 (1996): 165–91.

135 See Knauer, "Motive and Goal in Hannah Arendt's Concept of Political Action," 732.

136 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 171.

KD's practice is thus a process in which the artists provide the action, accompanied by the speech, whereas the spectator-participants (and later also the critics and the art historians) contribute with their stories, or the reports. This distinction becomes clear in the *Journeys* especially when comparing Kabakov's reports with the writings of Monastyrsky. Unlike Monastyrsky's texts, which in many cases resemble transcribed speech, the reports submitted by the spectator-participant Kabakov have a well-ordered causal sequence of episodes, which follow the logic of a narrative; they are stories that can be segmented into plot functions with a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Another way to distinguish between the artists' speech and their spectators' story is by distinguishing between those texts in the *Journeys* that address "things as they might happen" and the texts that describe "things that have happened"—a distinction that has been used to differentiate between poetry and history.¹³⁷ Most of the texts signed by the group's members, and especially by Monastyrsky, fall under the category "things as they might happen," for they comprise, for the most part, plots for actions, phonograms of conversations, and instructions written before or during the unfolding of the action. These texts in the *Journeys* (see above the artists' descriptions of the *actions Appearance, Ten Appearances, and Discussion*) are not only part of the speech that unfolded before and during the action but they may also be regarded as a certain poetic counterpart to the actions. Some critics have suggested this relationship in describing KD's work as "'collective' actionist poetry" (*'kollektivnaia' aktsionnaia poezia*); that is, a process of transition of the poetic into action, and vice versa.¹³⁸ The story, on the other hand, comprises those texts submitted by spectators and critics (see Kabakov's reports above) in order to present the "things that have happened" long after the actions accompanied by speech ("things as they might happen") are completed.

137 This is the Aristotelian distinction between poetry and history. For a more detailed discussion see Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. I. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 40.

138 Bobrinskaia, "O knigah 'Poezdki za gorod'," in Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 13–14.

The interaction between action, speech, and story has yet another range of significance for the work of KD. It concerns a series of extra-artistic implications that the group's actions had for Muscovite unofficial circles. KD's journeys, organized on a regular basis, contributed to the congregation of these artists into a community. Its actions provided the necessary conditions for the constitution of this community into what is now called "Moscow Conceptualism." This is the most significant outcome of action—the constitution of human plurality.

Action and speech—the most futile and the least "productive" of human endeavors—are the key constituents of the public realm, which Arendt theorizes drawing on the Athenian *polis*. She believed that the latter was that ideal space of human interaction that was later irrecoverably lost to the rise of the modern society. But "the polis, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical sense: it is the organization of the people that arises from their acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be."¹³⁹ The polis is that space formed by agents who voluntarily engage in the exchange of spontaneous actions. The polis is neither a thing nor a locus. It may be better visualized as a cloud that envelopes those who decide to participate in actions; the polis is a range of energies that drift and spread among those who dedicate themselves to unpremeditated actions, which as a rule are followed by ad-lib and unwritten cadenzas of speech. The complex web of interpersonal relations unleashed by spontaneous action and speech is radically different from that conformism, behaviorism, and automatism which characterizes modern human relations in both the capitalist "mass" and socialist "class" societies. Unlike the regulated and closely watched "activities" of the Soviet activists, KD's empty actions allowed for a space of communication in which no divisions existed between Party and non-Party members, between rulers and ruled, rich and poor, famous and unknown, talented and untalented. KD's actions, especially during the group's early phases, constituted a space for the pursuit of a goal whose essence was, in fact, having no particular goal except a dedication to leisure and art. For some participants even art was not the main aim, as some of the early reports indicate (see above Kabakov's report on the action *Appearance*). Not having an expectation, not pursuing particular goals—are these not

139 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 177.

examples of what Arendt defines as the aimless and the purposeless value of pure action? That is, of those acts that have not yet ended in the cold grip of modern instrumentality? Spontaneous action can survive neither in the private realm of the family, nor on any of society's levels. Thus it is the polis—the sphere of freedom from necessity—that serves as its ideal context.

Some Eastern European commentators did, in fact, depict the dissident milieu as a polis. In the late seventies the Czechoslovakian philosopher Václav Benda coined the phrase “parallel polis,” (*paralelní polis*) to refer to the dissident circle formed by those associated with the Charter 77 initiative.¹⁴⁰ The text became a manifesto that called for exercising soft pressure on totalitarian regimes by means of “unsanctioned” artistic, literary, cultural, and economic actions such as underground art, unauthorized concerts, samizdat publications, and the black market. The phrase “parallel polis” was one among many other terms that described those unofficial clusters of spontaneous collective energy; those engaged in them spoke also of an “independent society,” a “second society,” or “second polity,” “para-politics,” “anti-politics,” and so forth. Although the terms “parallel polis” or “parallel society” lose their meanings when regarded through Arendt's distinction between the private, the public, and the social realm—the latter being neither private nor public¹⁴¹—it may be still useful to take into account when one discusses the “unofficial” circle of artists, poets, writers, and philosophers that were active during the late decades of socialism. The before-*Journeys*, as well as the literature published in the next decades, clearly evoke a profound nostalgia for the open and informal atmosphere of these unofficial communities that existed during the seventies and the eighties in the shadow of the totalitarian society—a nostalgia that resembles in so many ways Arendt's own longing for and idealization of the ancient *polis*.

Thus KD's before-*Journeys* unfold within three distinct yet interconnected chains of processes (action, speech, and story), as well as spread across three distinct realms: the private realm, which included the artists and their families; the public realm, composed of friends (the so-called “spectator-participants”); and the broader social realm

140 Václav Benda “Parallel Polis” in Harold Gordon Skilling and Paul Wilson, eds., *Civic Freedom in Central Europe: Voices from Czechoslovakia* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991).

141 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 27.

of late Soviet society that in KD's language was designated by the term "anonymous spectators." Of these three realms, the last, although the most anonymous, was also the most pervasive and intimidating. This also explains why it was primarily this realm that had the greatest impact on the nature of KD's actions. In a particular, perverse way, the group drew heavily upon the Soviet experience and the overall logic of the Soviet ideological machinery. Its infinite recontextualizations, its interminable editing of the same content, its constant reframing of the text, and finally the self-referential nature of its work—in which each new action or story refers to another action or story, and each new concept refers to a string of other concepts—point to this resemblance. Therefore when critics insist that Moscow Conceptualism is a "socialist conceptualism,"¹⁴² they want to suggest that this cultural manifestation was the product of the late socialist system and that it reflected in many respects its main features, attributes, and transformations. But this reflection was a reversed one. It came as the result of an artistic estrangement (*ostranenie*) through which the routine automatism of the well-orchestrated and preplanned ceremonial activities invented and rehearsed within the offices of the party *aktivs* turned, on Kievogroskoe Field, into spontaneous or empty actions; as if emphasizing a distinction that must be always be kept in mind between action and activity, between performance and performativity, or between self-motivated collective enthusiasm and collectivistically enforced responsibilities. Before reaching the end of this chapter I would draw another quick parallel between Moscow and Western conceptual art—one I have sought to maintain systematically throughout this book.

If regarding Moscow Conceptualism as a byproduct of the late socialist ethos—as well as of the series of radical transformations that took place in the *modus operandi* of the ideological apparatus (the "performative shift")—is not seen as a highly controversial view, some assumptions with regard to the point of departure of Western conceptual art have been regarded as more provocative. Take, for instance, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh's suggestion—which has recently caught the imagination of many art critics and artists—that the emergence of conceptual art in the West should be viewed within its broader social and economic context.¹⁴³ Introducing the terms "aesthetics of administration" and "managerial aesthetics,"

142 Ekaterina Dyogot in Ilya Kabakov, *Tri installatsii* (Moskva: Ad Marginem, 2002), 18.

143 Buchloh, "From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique."

Buchloh argues that the emergence of conceptualism coincides with a series of major structural changes that took place on the economic level—an argument that led to a series of indignant responses from the early conceptualists.¹⁴⁴ In his view the “managerial aesthetics” of conceptual art was the result of the “managerial revolution” that some sociologists had proclaimed already in the early 1940s.¹⁴⁵ Buchloh suggests that the epithet “conceptual art,” as it emerged in the 1960s, should be regarded as a cultural manifestation of such economic and political transformations as the detachment of capital from material wealth, the gradual disappearance of the Fordist industrial model, and the separation of ownership and control as well as the emergence of the new class of managers. With the implementation of managerial forms of economic production, the new hegemonic class of managers does not need an aesthetics that draws directly upon the material artistic object, for the process of its fabrication resembles in so many ways the outdated methods of industrial capitalism;¹⁴⁶ instead, such managers opt for an aesthetics that invokes more abstract, deskilled, or dematerialized economic processes—an aesthetic reminiscent of the marketing and service industry that steps into the foreground of postindustrial society in the West.

Since Moscow conceptualists often compared their practices to those of their Western colleagues I will draw a quick parallel between the two different contexts that informed these distinct yet similar artistic programs. This difference may be expressed in terms of “economy,” “managers,” and “production and distribution of goods” versus “politics,” “activists” (or “apparatchiks”), and the “recycling and recirculation of ideological text.” Artists have stressed upon multiple occasions that Moscow Conceptualism was a consequence of “inhabiting a conceptual space” (Monastyrsky), “of living within Text” (Kabakov), or that “conceptualism and the Soviet cultural system were the same: producing not things, but the ideas of

144 The text has generated a heated debate, engaging such early proponents of American conceptualism as Joseph Kosuth and Seth Siegelaub in a fierce polemic. See, for example, Joseph Kosuth and Seth Siegelaub, “Joseph Kosuth and Seth Siegelaub Reply to Benjamin Buchloh on Conceptual Art,” *October* 57 (1991): 153–57.

145 For one of the earliest discussions of the term “managerial revolution” see James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution; What Is Happening in the World* (New York: The John Day Company, 1941).

146 Buchloh, “From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique.”

things" (Gundlakh).¹⁴⁷ Whereas Western conceptual or protoconceptual art resorts to event, body, or language in reaction to the disappearance of the Fordist industrial model of production and to a new division of labor following the advance of managerial and marketing economics, over the Iron Curtain conceptualism emerges in response to a shift from constative to performative methods of producing and distributing ideology. The shifts on both sides of the Iron Curtain shared a similar logic but unfolded on two different planes. In the capitalist West, the transformations occurred on the economic plane, where the manufacturing and selling of commodities became secondary to the management and marketing of products and services. In the USSR, during the last decades of state socialism, the changes unfolded on the political plane, where the production and distribution of original Party ideology—as done by the "old guard" Bolsheviks under Stalin—had been substituted by bureaucratic management and a rearrangement of worn-out ideological forms. On both sides of the Curtain, conceptual art could be seen as a cultural side effect of a new service-oriented economic or politico-ideological phase of postproduction. Under these new conditions within the socialist and capitalist socioeconomic contexts it is not surprising that the role of the artist became that of documenting, managing, arranging, and rearranging, or "docu-montaging"¹⁴⁸ the abundance of ready-made products (in the West) and of equally ready-made ideological artifacts captured in text, slogans, or banners (in the USSR). From now on, for many artists who called themselves "conceptual" on the two sides of the Wall, the main task was to constantly arrange and rearrange in new constellations of meaning all those commodities (or fetish objects) that flooded the Western markets and the public sphere, or all those ideological articles (or ideologemes) that took material form and invaded every corner of late-socialist reality. Both camps were dealing with a similar problem—an over-production of consumer goods on one side, and an over-production of ideological political content on the other. The emergence of conceptual art practices reflects this change, in a shift from making to acting.

147 Monastyrsky quoted in Bobrinskaia, *Kontseptualizm*, [unpaginated], Gundlakh quoted in Solomon, *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost*, 86–7.

148 John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Ready-Made* (London: Verso, 2007), 50.

But for those on the socialist side of the Wall, things would soon take a radical turn, and some of these changes would become visible in the subsequent evolution of Moscow Conceptualism and of KD's *Journeys Outside the City* after 1989.

Chapter 4

“DURING”: THE TRANSITION TO CAPITALISM

In 1989 KD dissolved, reuniting again only in 1995 as [KD]. During this six-year transitional period, its members dispersed, acting and exhibiting individually at home and abroad. There is less information about this time, and even if Monastyrsky occasionally mentions events or texts that took place during these six years, most of them have been assembled within the post-1989 *Journeys* post factum. In this respect the post-Soviet volumes of *Journeys* began as in the Soviet period: most of the material has been ordered, and sometimes even produced, retrospectively and retroactively. As in their first phase (1976–1980) the group’s members were once again individuals or, rather, individual artists; there would be no collective KD for a whole six years.

This chapter unfolds as if in the absence of the group per se, and its content is not immediately related to the group’s activities. I conceive of it as a rupture, a brusque separation of this group’s capitalist era from its socialist history; it may be imagined in terms of what Walter Benjamin called the “terror” of the “during” in between a historical “before” (French Revolution) and “after” (the Bourbon Restoration).¹ As KD’s former members traveled abroad during the first half of the nineties to represent a praised, prized, collected, and much sought-after unofficial Soviet art, I redirect my attention toward a more general discussion of the transition from socialism to capitalism and its effect on art. Here I follow the logic of the historical rupture in order to perform what the cubo-futurist Alexei Kruchenykh called a “semantic *sdvig*” (*smyslovoi sdvig*)—that is, a radical shift in meaning that allows a descent into emptiness, to the “zero degree of form” (or non-meaning), from there to ascend anew to a fresh interpretation of the post-1989 evolution of KD and their *Journeys*.²

1 Please see the Preface.

2 For various forms of *sdvig* see Kruchenykh, *Kukish proshliakam: faktura slova, sdvigologiya russkogo stikha, apokalipsis v russkoi literature*. For the descent to the “zero degree of form,” as explained by El Lissitzky with the example of Malevich’s *Black Square*, see note 87 in Chapter 2.

In this chapter I examine the political concept of “transition” (a counterpart to the Russian term *sdvig*) associated with a new paradigm in the Western social sciences called “transitology” (or to put it in Kruchenykh’s words “sdvigology”). From the early nineties, and for more than a decade, this discourse of transition became the new dominant ideology, even though—and this must be emphasized—it did not have the same effect in Russia as it would have in other postsocialist countries and republics of the former USSR. Nonetheless, one can still speak of the clash of two transitions; after all, Soviet socialism was, at least according to the Marxist-Leninist manuals, a merely transitional phase to communism. But unlike that seven-decade-long socialist transition, which headed toward abolishing capitalist exploitation and constructing a more equal and just society, the postsocialist “transition to democracy” came to openly embody processes that at times seemed to move in the opposite direction: back to market and capitalist relations of production.

Although Western transitology was directed primarily toward the political and economic spheres—and as such it did not have a robust cultural policy implemented on the state level, as was the case in the early decades of socialism—it also affected the realm of art and culture. The most evident effect of transition on the postsocialist institution of art was its emancipation from the ideological, political, and economic control of the state, and its growing dependence on market forces. The task of comprehending the wider forces that operated under the label of “transition to democracy and the market” has indeed been central to this study.

This chapter also introduces one particular mechanism of the cultural transition. The Soros Centers for Contemporary Arts (SCCA) were a network of art centers established in Eastern Europe during the nineties by the American philanthropist George Soros. The SCCAs were implemented as mechanisms of transition in order to help democratize art in the post-Soviet space, snatching it from the grasp of the socialist state and its totalizing cultural doctrine. There was no close relationship between KD and this institution of transition, except for the fact that the Moscow SCCA financially contributed to the publication of the first five volumes of the *Journeys Outside the City*. For the moment, then, I leave behind Kievogorskoe Field and zoom out over a larger area once closed off behind the Wall, as well as over a wider discursive terrain. The transition of the nineties was, for many Eastern European artists and critics, experienced

as a historical rupture, and in what follows I would introduce some of its key ideas and themes, which touch upon the distinct yet related spheres of the social and political sciences and of cultural policy and management. I include this chapter in the interstices of KD's interrupted history in the belief that it prepares the ground for a more thorough discussion of the "after-1989" part of the *Journeys* in the next and final chapter of this book.

TRANSITION AND TRANSITOLOGY

In Eastern Europe the phrase "decade of transition" refers to the nineties, when the countries of the former Soviet bloc went through a series of radical transformations that touched upon every sphere of social life. Through the end of the decade and beyond into the new century, the word "transition" played a very significant role, serving as a nodal point that tied, held together, and organized manifold threads of ideas and themes variously related to the processes of transformation taking place in this region. Politicians spoke of the necessity of making a transition from the one-party state to a new electoral system based on multiparty parliamentary politics; economists were planning the transition from a gargantuan planned and state-controlled macroeconomy to a free and allegedly self-regulating market based on respect for private property; humanist intellectuals, promoting the values of the civil society, called for a transition to a democratic and open society in which basic human rights and individual freedoms would be recognized and valued; cultural critics opted for a transition to an open culture grounded in universal human values. In other words, "transition" and "transformation" are unavoidable words when one brings into discussion the social, economic, and cultural processes that took place in every field of post-Soviet and postsocialist life in recent decades.³

The popularity of the concept of "transition" in the region was precipitated, in part, by a new academic and political paradigm known as "transformation studies" or "transitology," a discourse within the social

3 Samuel Huntington makes a distinction between the political concept of "transition" and that of "transformation." The latter term designates a model of transition that does not necessarily involve a change of political elites and rulers. I will not abide by this distinction, but will instead use the two words synonymously.

sciences that arose from the modernization theories of the late 1940s. Transitology uses the concept of “transition” to examine and support a tendency that evolved in world politics in the second half of the last century—namely, the fall of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, and the massive transition of various countries to Western-style democracies. Within Western (and in particular American) academia, transitology emerged as a new area of research that initially came to complement and later to replace other methods used to analyze global political processes. In its two hypostases (as pure academic discipline, and as practical policy-making) transitology became instrumental in implementing a series of radical political and economic transformations in the postauthoritarian and post-totalitarian states, which may explain why the word “transition” acquired such a special significance, especially at the peripheries of the Western world. In other words, the discourse of transition was not only an academic subdiscipline and theoretical method, but also a foreign policy tool used by Western governments to promote democratic and market reforms in Second and Third World countries.

The idea of transition is not a strictly political or economic one. Reinhart Koselleck links the concept of “transition” to the notion of “epochal threshold” (*Epochenschwelle*), which, he suggests, developed toward the end of the eighteenth century amid the emergence of a new historical consciousness and a new understanding of lived time that he considers to be the true beginning of modernity. “Epochal consciousness” is an awareness of living in a transitional period, when “history no longer takes place in time, but rather through time.”⁴ A transitional stage is experienced simultaneously as an end and as a beginning—between an “afterward no longer” and a “beforehand not yet.”⁵ Transitional time is like an intermediary, lacking an ontological basis of its own and existing only as a point of connection between times understood as past and as future. Regarded from this perspective transition appears as one of the most crucial concepts for the understanding of modernity.

But one must make a distinction between “modernity,” “modernism,” and “modernization.” “Modernity” is the *historical* category that expresses a new mode of experiencing space and time, the self and others; “modernism” is the *cultural* term that registers the new visions

⁴ Koselleck et al., *The Practice of Conceptual History*, 165.

⁵ Ibid., 155.

and values of a certain epoch; and "modernization" must be regarded in *technological* terms, for it designates social processes that bring the maelstrom of the modern age into being.⁶ From the perspective of this conceptual differentiation, transitology can be understood in technological terms as a part of the process of modernization that brings the spirit of modernity and modernism into regions that have lagged behind in history. Transitology can be regarded as a component of political technology used to modernize the periphery. In rather simplified form, one may see academic transitology as a discipline that produced knowledge and expertise which was then passed through various institutional mechanisms in the form of recommendations, directives, and grants to the elites at the peripheries.

The basic assumptions of transitology revolve around the idea that "any country moving away from dictatorial rule can be considered a country in transition toward democracy."⁷ The nearly 100 countries, located in seven regions of the world,⁸ that toward the end of the last century were emerging from totalitarian and authoritarian regimes were expected, irrespective of their religious, cultural, and national distinctions, to undergo a violent metamorphosis and to integrate themselves into the global world of liberal democracy and the free market. These processes were part of a political trend that unfolded in various parts of the world during the last quarter of the twentieth century.⁹ Toward the end of the decade and especially early into the next century it became more and more clear that many countries were not registering any considerable progress

6 For a discussion of this tripartite differentiation see Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 15–17.

7 Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 1 (2002), 6.

8 "Approximately 20 in Latin America, 25 in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, 30 in Sub-Saharan Africa, 10 in Asia, and five in Middle East." *Ibid.*, 6–7.

9 "In the last quarter of the twentieth century, trends in seven different regions converged to change the political landscape of the world: 1) the fall of right-wing authoritarian regimes in Southern Europe in the mid-1970s; 2) the replacement of military dictatorships by elected civilian governments across Latin America from late 1970s through the late 1980s; 3) the decline of authoritarian rule in parts of East and South Asia starting in the mid 1980s; 4) the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s; 5) the breakup of the Soviet Union and the establishment of fifteen post-Soviet republics in 1991; 6) the decline of one-party regimes in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa in the first half of the 1990s; 7) a weak but recognizable liberalizing trend in some Middle Eastern countries in the 1990s." *Ibid.*, 5.

on the path to democracy and that their transitions had stalled. The failure of these “gray-zone countries” to reach the “post-transitological” stage of democratic “consolidation” or “normalization” led some transitologists to question the validity of their major assumptions, and to call for an end to the transition paradigm.¹⁰ But this did not mean that the West had given up on the idea of promoting democracy and the market throughout these global gray zones, but rather that political scientists and governmental officials were seeking more effective tools to achieve these goals.

As I have observed, transitology flowed logically from the “modernization theories” method of the fifties and sixties. The latter dominated the political and social sciences, and by extension U.S. foreign policy during the period of so-called “embedded liberalism.” In the words of Walt Rostow, who was one of the major contributors to the elaboration of these theories, modernization came as “a new postcolonial relationship between the northern and the southern halves of the Free World. ... As the colonial ties are liquidated, new and more constructive relationships can be built ... a new partnership among free men—rich and poor alike.”¹¹ Modernization theories analyzed political transformation in terms of long-term socioeconomic processes, explaining the emergence of democracy in terms of capitalist development, modernization, and the growth of affluence. This sociological model “measured” societies according to their position on a “developmental” scale, in accordance with a series of dichotomies. The main dichotomy—“traditional” versus “modern” society—gathered under its wing an entire gamut of conflicting oppositions: folk-urban, *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft*, cosmopolitan-local, sacred-secular, land-cash, illiteracy-enlightenment, resignation-ambition, piety-pleasure, mobile individual-static individual, projective psyche-introjective psyche, trousers-shalwars, fedora-fez, and so forth. Non-Western societies were ranked or “audited” (to use a term from Daniel Lerner’s popular book *The Passing of Traditional Society*) according to how they were positioned in relation to these dichotomies.¹² “The Moderns on one side are cosmopolitan, urban, literate, usually well-off, and seldom devout—and

10 Ibid., 19.

11 Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 16.

12 See Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1958).

the Traditionals on the other side—they are just the opposite.”¹³ Lerner proposed three character types: 1) the Traditionals, 2) the Moderns, and 3) the Transitionals. The third are the “societies-in-a-hurry”; they are in the state of becoming, negotiating between two poles: the enlightened progress of the Moderns, on one side, and the static ignorance of the Traditionals, on the other. To put it in Lerner’s words examining the traditional society of the Middle East: “What the West is... the Middle East seeks to become.”¹⁴ The Transitionals are transitional in every aspect, sharing characteristics of both archetypes (Traditional and Modern) without being one or the other. A Transitional, for instance, is someone who is immersed in mass media but cannot read, persisting in the so-called postliterate state;¹⁵ s/he has picked up new desires from Hollywood, but cannot satisfy or materialize them due to the lack of corresponding social and economic institutions capable of providing adequate opportunity for mobility. It is these imbalances that would need to be addressed. Modernization theorists argued that contact with Western film and radio would help the postliterate Transitional to make a transition to the print media, and would also motivate him/her to achieve increased efficiency, greater skill, and material rewards.

But modernization theory soon came under attack, mainly because of its methodology, as modernization theories were constructed upon totalizing systems that favored macrohistorical or macrosociological analysis inspired by earlier sociological models. The new generation of sociologists, which focused on the transitional type, called for the development of more efficient tools for understanding the nature of democracy in the seventies and eighties. Their paradigm shift demanded more positivistic approaches and a higher degree of specialization and fragmentation of the field of study.

With his 1970 article “Transition to Democracy,” Dankwart Rustow was among the first to abandon the macro-analysis model. Driven by an interest in the nature of democracy, he asked himself the following question: “What conditions make democracy possible and what conditions make it thrive?”¹⁶ The question was not new, as theories of political change had existed for

13 Ibid., 13.

14 Ibid., 47.

15 Ibid., 17.

16 Dankwart A. Rustow, “Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model,” *Comparative Politics* 2, no. 3 (1970), 337.

a long time. Rustow's novelty was his "dynamic" model, also known as a procedural or genetic model, which challenged the functionalist or the structural methods of the modernization theorists. Instead of working within a structural field limited by oppositional sets (e.g., modern-traditional, folk-urban, *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft*), Rustow proposed a method that favored diachrony over synchrony, cause over correlation, and concrete empirical analyses over vague theoretical speculations. The new "dynamic" method recuperated the discredited category of causality, asking for a set of concrete "why," "how," and "what" questions: how is democracy possible, for example, and why are some countries democratic while others are not?¹⁷ Rustow's paper has been considered one of the foundations of transitology, while its title, "Transition to Democracy," became a popular political slogan.

In the late eighties a group of scholars associated with the Woodrow Wilson Center at Princeton University published *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*—a collective analysis on the progress of democratization in Latin America.¹⁸ This book, regarded as a cornerstone of the new subdiscipline, described its new approach in terms of "comparative studies of political modernizing processes since the Second World War."¹⁹ At this stage the analysts of the political transition did not yet discuss the processes taking place in the late eighties in Moscow (Gorbachev's politics of "new thinking" and the new democratic changes in the USSR), but one can assume that it was precisely the collapse of the communist governments in Eastern Europe and the breakup of the Soviet Union that made the new method popular in academic and government circles. From the early nineties, transitology began to gain ground in departments of social science,

17 The author illustrates this method by bringing in two case studies in which he analyzes Sweden's and Turkey's transitions to democracy. The new method clearly delimits each country's period of transition, pointing out how they vary in length. For instance, Britain's transition to democracy lasted from before 1640 to 1918, and Sweden's lasted only from 1890 to 1920, while in the case of Turkey the process of Westernization began in 1945 and is still underway. *Ibid.*, 347–50.

18 Guillermo A. O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule. Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

19 Claus Offe, *Varieties of Transition: The East European and East German Experience*, 1st MIT Press ed., Studies in contemporary German social thought (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), 31.

displacing older methodologies. For instance, specialists in "area studies," as well as those who worked in Soviet and comparative communist studies, began to be replaced by highly specialized transitologists who favored specific case studies based on empirical evidence.²⁰

The main task of pure or academic transitology during the nineties was to provide an explanation for the sudden and unexpected collapse of the Communist regimes, as well as to develop new theories and prescriptions for more effective political and economic modernization in the transitional regions. Practical or applied transitology, on the other hand, was used (like modernization theory in its own time) as a policy-making tool that helped implement and introduce theory in practice. The two acted in tandem: theoreticians forged new tools and invented new strategies, and the practitioners together with the local elites implemented them by means of various programs funded by Western governments and diverse private agencies and foundations. These implementations were first and foremost concerned with dismantling the socialist economic and political system, and the specialists in transition assisted the local elites in building new democratic political institutions, establishing new fiscal policies, promoting deregulation and the elimination of subsidies; and, in short, enacting new capitalist mechanisms.

Transitology differs from its predecessors in several ways. For instance, in their time modernization theorists were critical of the European colonialists who were interested exclusively in modernizing the local elites. The modernization theorists suggested new approaches that allowed a wider impact on the field. Such new media as radio and cinema were regarded as the most efficient tools of modernization, tools that would help ignite the spirit of progress among the postcolonial masses. Applied transitology is different in this regard, even seeming at times to return to the agenda of European colonialism. It ignores the masses and again puts

20 For the emergence of the paradigm of transitology see Frank Bönker, Klaus Müller, and Andreas Pickel, *Postcommunist Transformation and the Social Sciences: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 4. On "Area Studies" see David L. Sills and Robert King Merton, *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan, 1968); University Grants Committee, "Report of the Sub-Committee on Oriental, Slavonic, East European and African Studies" (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1961); H. A. R. Gibb, *Area Studies Reconsidered* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1963).

its stress on the local elites, designating them as the sole agents of change and democratization. Rustow stresses that the transition to democracy “uniformly begins only when elites make a conscious decision to negotiate a political settlement through a procedural consensus on the rules of the game.”²¹

Although as a discourse and as an instrument of foreign policy transitology may seem new, its major assumptions are not. The belief that the Western political and economic model is the final destination for the rest of the world has its origins in the Age of Enlightenment. Transition is a new word for the two-century-old idea of progress, and some of transitology’s main assumptions were formulated under its aegis. The Marquis de Condorcet—reflecting at the end of the eighteenth century on the future of progress—asked rhetorically: “Will all nations one day attain the state of civilization which the most enlightened, the freest and the least burdened by prejudices, such as the French and the Anglo-Americans, have attained already?”²² Perhaps it would have pleased him to know that two hundred and fifty years later his vision would re-emerge (not in the interrogative but in the indicative mood) in formulating the main task of the new paradigm of transitology:

The common thread uniting the diverse transition approaches is a central assumption that the historical experience of transformation from authoritarianism to democracy and the emergence of capitalism in the states of Western Europe and North America in the eighteenth century provide generalisable lessons and an analytical framework for understanding and promoting similar processes of change and outcomes in other states. The basic premise is self-evidently normative and linear: that the values, structures, and political procedures of advanced Western democracies are the most developed and should be transplanted.²³

21 Rustow quoted in James Hughes, “Transition Models and Democratization in Russia,” in *Russia after the Cold War*, eds. Mike Bowker and Cameron Ross (Harlow, England; New York: Longman, 2000), 26.

22 Marquis de Condorcet, “The Future Progress of the Human Mind,” in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 27.

23 Hughes, “Transition Models and Democratization in Russia,” 21.

This formulation of transitology does not differ very much from Condorcet's. "Prejudices," for example, have become "authoritarianism," whereas "freedom" and "civilization" have been translated into "democracy" and "capitalism."

Condorcet was not alone in proposing the Western path of progress and modernization to the rest of the world, and among many other early advocates of this idea were such figures as Montesquieu, Sir James Steuart, William Robertson, Thomas Paine, David Hume, and Adam Smith.²⁴ One may also find an early prototype for transitology and its method of gradual improvement in stages in the discipline of the philosophy of history that emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, dividing time into chains of historical phases, stages, and steps of development. In Condorcet's model of history there are nine stages leading up to a tenth in which reason wins over superstition and ignorance; in Giambattista Vico's model there are three stages that society must pass through in order to create equality for all; in Adam Smith there are four ages that lead to the highest "age of Commerce."

In both its theoretical and applied forms transitology carries forward a project that originated during the age of Enlightenment. To put it briefly: transitology is the enlightenment of the non-Western "other"; it is progress for the non-Western world; it is a tool, a mechanism of political technology that operates under the assumption that the West has already reached the stage, the age of progress, and that now is the time to help others. Conflicting methodologies for supporting such changes exist among Western sociologists of transition, but despite differing political and methodological agendas, the opposing camps have long seemed to agree that the world moves towards progress and democracy. At least they did agree on this during the 1990s. Advocates of the "dynamic" method viewed the final stage as "post-transitology," "normalization," or "consolidation" into liberal-democratic regimes; while the other, more speculative camp of "functionalist" sociologists, theorizing the Eastern and Central European transitions in broader historical terms, regarded it in terms of a "retrieval" in which non-Western nations strive to complete the project of Enlightenment and modernity by "catching up" with the West.²⁵

24 Albert Hirschman quoted in Bönker, Müller, and Pickel, *Postcommunist Transformation and the Social Sciences: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches*, 226.

25 This is Jürgen Habermas's view. See Claus Offe, "An Excursion to the Transitology Zoo," in *Postcommunist Transformation and the Social Sciences: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches*, 251.

One of the approaches practiced in the applied or policy-making branch of transitology concerns institutionalism, or the transfer of Western institutional models and norms to the transitional countries. The imitation of proven institutions within Western Europe and North America, the import of already tested institutional mechanisms, has been regarded as a very effective method of changing behaviors in accordance with the constraints of new institutional boundaries—an approach that has been termed “capitalism by design.”²⁶

THE CULTURAL TRANSITION: THE SCCA MODEL

What were the repercussions of this “self-evident” discourse of transition to democracy and to market economics in the arts, and what are the traces of this discourse of modernization within the field of the fine or visual arts? As belief in a more just sociopolitical order came to fill the ideological vacuum left after the collapse of Marxism-Leninism, some associated ideas soon emerged in the domains of art and culture. In the arts the term “transition” came to express, above all, the desire to break with the previous ways in which artists interacted with society and the state. Since the earliest days of socialism a certain category of artists has become very critical of the way in which the communist state treated its intellectuals. After the death of Stalin many so-called “unofficial” or “nonconformist” circles emerged in socialist countries and some of the USSR republics mainly as a form of protest against the cultural policy of the socialist state. The transformations that took place during the 1990s were in many respects based on, informed by, and even carried on by many of those who had been part of the unofficial or dissident traditions. Their dissatisfactions revolved, in general lines, around the belief that the state has no right to interfere with artists’ work with regard to either artistic form or content, or with their exhibitions or interactions with the public. Their main aspirations were toward the emancipation of art from the control of the state; art was to gain or regain its autonomy and become, as

26 On “capitalism by design” see David Stark and Laszlo Brust, *Postsocialist Pathways: Transforming Politics and Property in East Central Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

in the enlightened Western societies, unaccountable to the institutions of power: no more kings and popes after the Enlightenment—no more state bureaucrats and Party activists after socialism.

This segment of transition, therefore, headed in the same direction as it did in other spheres of social life: away from the state, away from a model in which an artist is either within or outside the boundaries of the Party's official cultural policy; away from circumstances in which it seems there is only one possible way of making art; away from the mass-membership system of the Unions of Artists that offered artists benefits no capitalist institution would ever offer, but only if they could at least pretend that they embraced the classicizing pathos of socialist realist aesthetics—a doctrine that, while not followed with equal rigor everywhere, nevertheless remained the official cultural policy in the countries of the socialist camp. Meanwhile, the transitional period brought to the surface a series of new questions: what was to be the role of the arts and of the artist in the new social order, how should one perceive of the artist's relation to his or her work, colleagues, and audience? Who will see to the artist's economic interests? To help answer some of these questions, a number of Western private and governmental organizations stepped in. The Open Society Institute has been the most active in this field, launching its Soros Centers for Contemporary Art (SCCA) network, a program that today cannot be ignored if one is to understand the changes that took place in the art of the former East Bloc over the past decades.

The transformations that took place in art were neither less dramatic nor less intense than those that occurred in other spheres of social life, and the impact of such institutions as the SCCA on art, culture, and cultural policy may be very well be compared to the impact of such key international instruments of transition as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, whose policies have fundamentally affected political and economic policies in the former socialist countries. Unlike other private and public foreign foundations and programs that mostly provided resources for art and culture, the SCCAs were both financing and enacting mechanisms: they designed special programs, projects, and policies; promoted the newest art media and formats of display; and educated local artists on matters of cultural management and fundraising. Most importantly, they acted as one entity through the coordinated efforts of twenty art centers that expanded across the entire postsocialist map, from Prague to Alma-Aty.

The SCCA network sprouted from a small program of Soros Foundation Budapest called the Soros Fine Arts Documentation Center.²⁷ The program was established in the mid-eighties, at a time when the official cultural policy of socialist Hungary—a system of division known as the “three Ts” (under which culture was Totally Supported, Tolerated, or Totally Banned)—had begun to break down. The first significant shift, or the artistic transition proper, began in 1991, when the Soros Fine Arts Documentation Center was renamed the “Soros Center for Contemporary Art.” With the full support of George Soros and under the directorship of Suzanne Meszoly—the Australian artist and curator of Hungarian descent who worked on the idea of a broader Eastern European art network while still employed by the Soros Fine Arts Documentation Center—the renamed program was gradually expanded into eighteen postsocialist countries and former republics of the USSR. By the late 1990s twenty centers, interconnected through diverse regional projects and initiatives, worked together toward adjusting local artistic scenes to the new socioeconomic regimes, seeking meanwhile to integrate these scenes within a broader Western, or global, contemporary art world.²⁸

The ideas that informed the mission and activities of the SCCA program were the same that influenced the philanthropic activism of George Soros. Over the years the main source of inspiration for Soros remained the writings of his distinguished tutor at the London School of Economics, the influential liberal thinker and philosopher of science Karl Popper. The name of the managerial group that coordinated the work of his foundation, the Open Society Institute, points to one of Popper’s best-known works of social theory: *Open Society and Its Enemies*. When the

27 “The first SCCA was established in Budapest by the Soros Foundation Hungary in 1985. In 1992, two additional SCCAs were opened in Prague and Warsaw, and in 1993–94, the network expanded to a total of 16 SCCAs. By 1998 there were 20 SCCAs located in 18 countries.” For a short history of the SCCA network see Nina Czegledy and Andrea Szekeres, “Agents of Change: The Contemporary Art Centers of the Soros Foundation and C3,” in *Third Text* 23, no. 3 (2009): 251–59. See also the websites of C3 in Budapest (<http://www.c3.hu/scca/>) and SCCA Zagreb. <http://www.scca.hr/eng/history.html> [accessed July 5, 2010].

28 The network’s mission was set in the following terms: “The SCCAs are open art centers. They maintain information on international grants, scholarships, arts program, exhibitions, and other events. . . . The SCCAs support artistic experiments which broaden the aesthetic borders of visual culture.” From the “SCCA network” brochure published by the Open Society Institute Budapest, 1998.

book was first published in 1945 it resonated with the concerns of a world divided over incompatible political doctrines. One of the main postulates of Popper's social theory is the idea of fallibility; that is to say, human beings are capable of making mistakes, of being fallible, and truth is only an ideal toward which all knowledge must tend—a conclusion to which Popper had arrived earlier in his works on the philosophy of science. In a better social order, which he called the "open society," no one can claim the right to hold the truth; instead, truth is the result of an ongoing negotiation between the people and the state through the intermediacy of various institutions that need to be constantly developed and improved. An open society can only take shape when people realize the danger of certain philosophical doctrines, put forward by those whom Popper has designated as "enemies of the open society." Throughout the book Popper criticizes authoritarian tendencies in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, and Marx, suggesting that these thinkers must be held responsible for modern forms of totalitarianism, for so-called "closed societies." Popper is especially critical of Hegel and Marx and, in particular, their conviction that history has one meaning; that there are universal laws of history, which, once discovered and understood, can be tuned to accommodate the needs of humankind. It is this kind of "historicist" thinking that Popper believes has led to totalitarian politics, to social "tribalism," revolutions, and social unrest. Consistent with a liberal understanding of history, Popper argues that history instead comprises particular and often accidental events—that there are many histories, that there cannot be one but a multitude of historical interpretations, none of them final. In other words, all interpretations are fallible and in need of constant improvement.²⁹

These ideas—presented here very briefly, and only in order to outline the intellectual background that has informed the cultural transition—became guiding principles in the agenda of the Open Society Institute and by extension of the SCCA network. Although neither Popper nor Soros gave serious thought to, or showed particular interest in, matters related to the art of their time, one can see some of the key concepts of the "open society" at work in the activities of the SCCA program and the new art that it promoted. We can say that "contemporary art"—the phrase that stood for the new paradigm popularized by these offices in the former socialist

29 Here I assimilate some of the ideas expressed in Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Golden Jubilee Edition (London: Routledge, 1995).

countries—was the art most suited for an open society; it was the model that did not affirm or set any firm aesthetic or political truth, belief, or doctrine, leaving everything uncertain and fallible—open and ready for continuous negotiation and contestation as expected of an open society. Contemporary art was to be understood as the open and democratic model that came to guarantee artists their freedom of expression; it was presented as the art that had inherited and carried forward the most advanced and progressive ideas in Western culture, and which therefore could be transplanted to Second World countries (as discussed above in the context of the ideology of Enlightenment and the discourse of transition).

The new model contrasted sharply with those artistic institutions the artists themselves were most familiar with. Indeed, during the implementation of the SCCA program some centers found themselves in opposition to local Artists Unions (professional associations of artists akin to socialist trade unions)—an opposition that, while not necessarily confrontational, persisted due to contrasting missions, modes of operation, and functions.³⁰ The Artists Union was an organizational model under socialism, one whose task of supporting artists was closest in its mission with that of the SCCA centers. Of course, the roles of Creative Unions varied from country to country; and yet formally, at least, most of them still remained the *official* institutions for regulating the lives of artists, writers, or musicians under socialism.³¹ Aside from having a similar goal—namely, that of supporting artistic production and distribution—the two differed significantly in their forms of organization and modes of operation. Here are just a few differences: unlike an Artists

30 In those parts of this text where I discuss the differences between the SCCAs and the Artists' Unions I draw primarily on the situation in the former Soviet Union, with which I am most familiar, as well as on my personal experience as the founding director of the SCCA Chisinau, Moldova.

31 Within the socialist bloc, Artists Unions played a decisive role in regulating cultural life. In some countries they held a stronger grip on the art world than in others. In Poland, for instance, where Socialist Realism had lost its sway by 1954 (a year after the death of Stalin), the Union of Polish Artists (ZPAP) was, by 1980, part of the Solidarity movement and thus operating underground. But even in Poland, where ZPAP was also partially supporting independent, so-called "unofficial" initiatives and artists (e.g., Galeria Foksal or Krzysztofory, both associated with Tadeusz Kantor) Artists Unions remained the *official* organ to organize the lives of artists—to provide low-rent studios or the opportunity to exhibit. See Anda Rottenberg, "Between Institution and Tradition: The Artist in Search for Freedom," in Laura J. Hoptman ed., *Beyond Belief: Contemporary Art from East Central Europe* (Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 1995).

Union, which supported only its members (e.g., painters, sculptors, and graphic artists), the Soros Centers were formally open to anyone who could produce quality art or new, preferably *nonpolitical*, original, contemporary art projects in one of the most popular media formats (installation, multimedia, video); unlike the Unions, which were dedicated only to those who had received professional training in an established art school, the Soros Centers were open for collaboration with all artists regardless of their education or experience; and unlike the Unions, which oversaw almost all aspects of their artist-members' lives—from offering exhibition space to allotting (through artists' funds) government commissions, studios, and materials, as well as apartments, holiday trips, pensions, and subsidized kindergarten facilities for children—the SCCA operated on a time-to-time basis, offering only contractually based grants, or renting and subcontracting goods and services through third-party agents, often through a publicly announced tender.

The centers differed in every crucial respect from the Unions. First and foremost, they had not been established to represent the interests of large masses of artists. Resembling contemporary corporate management in practice—with a board of experts consisting of art historians and critics legislating the activities of the executive managers in offices (unlike the local unions, ruled by collectively elected committees of artists)—the Soros Centers promoted and supported within local art communities primarily what was regarded as new or "cutting edge": the latest trends in contemporary art, art criticism, and cultural management. This program launched the earliest exhibitions of contemporary art, often accompanied by symposia and workshops held by Western artists and curators or regional and East-West international collaborations. In addition, the Soros Centers served as a resource base—collecting and distributing information on local and foreign art, providing access to information, inspiring artists to explore and experiment with new media, and providing training in project planning and grant writing.³²

32 For a more detailed discussion of the differences between the SCCA and the Unions of Artists see also Octavian Eșanu, "What Was Contemporary Art," *ARTMargins* 1, no. 1 (2012): 5-28. For a discussion of similar contradictions—namely, in interactions between artists and managers—and within a Western context, see Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2007) and Eve Chiapello, *Artistes versus managers: Le management culturel face à la critique artiste* (Paris: Métailié, 1998).

Consistent with a liberal understanding of history—history understood as many particular histories of the sporadic advance of freedom and liberty—the Centers brought to the public’s attention new types of truth, introducing a large array of themes and motifs to the local art scenes. Events financed and organized by the Centers dealt with issues of identity politics as artists, curators, and critics directed public opinion toward new topics that dealt with the representation of gender, sexuality, marginality, ethnicity, desire, and the body. These new concerns often led to tense relationships with local cultural bureaucracies, which often sought to safeguard “national values” and which regarded SCCA’s cultural policy, generously financed from abroad, as a threat to local heritage. These cultural contradictions resembled, to some extent, the negotiating factions and parties in the political and economic spheres. Exclusive support for the latest artistic media or for themes and issues that had not been traditionally part of local cultural discourse often led to Luddite responses and to *rappels à l’ordre*, calls from artists to turn back toward a new academism or classicism or to an authentic national religious art (as was the case with such movements of the nineties as the Saint Petersburg-based New Academism, or the Romanian Neo-Byzantines).

Critics of the SCCAs often asked, as did the Romanian art historian Erwin Kessler: “What is the main task of the Soros Centers for Contemporary Art—to detect and sustain artists, indifferently of the genres and the techniques in which they choose to express themselves, or to reformulate the current aesthetics and to re-dimension it according to some (imported) ‘standards’ that are in use in the contemporary world?”³² Many would agree that the answer is in fact stated in the second half of this question, for most of the SCCAs, especially in their initial phase, directed their main efforts and resources toward promoting contemporary art, which at that time was primarily recognized according to such new genres, techniques, and forms of expression as installation, performance, video,

32 For a more detailed discussion of the differences between the SCCA and the Unions of Artists see also Octavian Eșanu, “What Was Contemporary Art,” *ARTMargins* 1, no. 1 (2012): 5–28. For a discussion of similar contradictions—namely, in interactions between artists and managers—and within a Western context, see Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2007) and Eve Chiapello, *Artistes versus managers: Le management culturel face à la critique artiste* (Paris: Métailié, 1998).

33 Erwin Kessler, *Cearta* (Bucharest: Nemira, 1997), 123.

and computer art. The Centers' activities aimed at a rapid modernization of the arts, resembling in this regard similar processes taking place in other fields (from banking to commerce and agriculture)—processes that may be accurately described, to return to Jürgen Habermas's understanding of transition, as ones of "retrieval" and of "catching up" with the West.

This was especially evident in the annual exhibitions organized by many Soros Centers, where the contemporary art shown in the gallery simultaneously introduced the spectator to the art of performance and installation as well as to the latest products of Western consumer electronics, communications, and information technologies. Contemporary Eastern European curators and artists worshiped the new media and communication technologies, regarding them as democratizing tools, much in the same way as the Western radical countercultural movements had seen revolutionary potential in new technologies decades earlier. In their prefaces to annual exhibition catalogs, SCCA directors and curators wrote of an urgent need to change the artistic status quo, of the need to modernize the language of art; in doing so they expressed faith in the emancipatory power of the new media and communication technologies. For example, "[the exhibition] 01010101 . . . [uses] new media with no consideration for its impact on the traditional culture," "the new media are the solution for the internal crisis in Romanian art," and "We cannot afford to keep the fifty-year distance from the Western model, so we must hurry up and catch up."³⁴

Although the Soros centers shared similar objectives, acting according to a set of common principles recommended by an international board of Western experts assembled by the New York office, they often differed with regard to local cultural particularities and even matters of direction, style, or medium in contemporary art.

Some foundations preferred the logic of minimalism (albeit by now a richly inflected, resonantly remodernising kind) in both the artists whom they supported and the mode of their operations, whereas other foundations were seeking to match their approaches to the multivalent, diverse and dispersive spirit of more contemporary

34 Excerpts from preface by Calin Dan in "01010101 ...exhibition catalogue of the 2nd annual exhibition of SCCA," Bucharest (1994).

art. While the former was well advanced, and probably perfected at Dia:Beacon, the latter was very much a work in progress.³⁵

As SCCA international board member Lynn Cooke suggests above, it was not only that the centers expressed a preference for artists who worked in a particular manner, but even that certain managerial approaches employed by a director and the staff could be understood in terms of favoring a particular Western artistic style. Of course, the choice of any modernist, minimalist, or multivalent contemporary style of art management or support was entirely dependent upon the specialization or interest of the director, upon the tastes of the coordinators, or the professional interests and fields of expertise of the board members.

By the late nineties, which corresponds to the final phase of the SCCA network, its board and executive members became more critical of the role and aims of their institutions. They raised a series of problematic issues, including that of the unequal character of the dialogue between Western and Eastern European cultural representatives, a dialogue often dominated by a patronizing attitude on the part of the Westerners. Some directors questioned and sought to redefine the role of the institution of contemporary art in society, launching projects that addressed the necessity of publishing more critical and extensive material and educating the public on the history of contemporary art and its role in society.³⁶ Toward the end of the nineties the Open Society Institute proceeded gradually to reduce funding for this program. Individual SCCAs were advised to register as independent NGOs and to search for alternative sources of financing.³⁷ In 1999 members of the SCCA network created the International Contemporary Art Network (ICAN), which was launched for collaborative but also and most importantly for fundraising purposes, but their efforts to establish themselves as self-

35 Lynn Cooke, who served on the international board of the SCCA network, quoted in Terry Smith, *Contemporary Art + Philanthropy: Public Spaces/Private Funding*. (Sydney, NSW: UNSW Press, 2007), 16.

36 See for instance Alenka Pirman, *Research & Education in Contemporary Art in Eastern and Central Europe: on Initiation, Development, and Implementation of a Network Program 1998–2000* (Ljubljana: Open Society Institute Slovenia, 2000).

37 "Each SCCA should fundraise 25% of non-Soros money in order to gain the other 25% of its 1998 budget from its National OSI, with the deadline of 1 July 1999." SCCA-Zagreb Strategy and Business Plan 2000–2003, at <http://snap.archivum.ws/> [accessed December 7, 2008].

sustainable institutions have not met with significant success. To date only a few of these centers maintain even a low level of activity within their local cultural contexts.

What was the overall impact of this program on the local scenes? It can be argued that the SCCA model has affected the fine or the visual arts in the same way in which other mechanisms of transition have changed the "rules of the game" in other social fields. Using an economic terminology, one can say that the effect can be understood in terms of liberalization or deregulation of this field of art. Here, I must insist on the term "liberalization" over "democratization," given that the cultural policies promoted by the SCCA network have largely stimulated liberal or individualistic principles rather than aiming to attain more egalitarian ends among practitioners of both new and traditional, contemporary and fine arts. While on the artistic or aesthetic level, the SCCA removed barriers that stood in the way of artistic innovation, bringing the ethos of individual autonomy and individual expression from out of its former "unofficial" status under socialism, on the administrative level it shattered the belief that the state had to be the sole patron, commissioner, supporter, and judge of the artist. The program devoted substantial material and human resources to delegate some of these functions to other social players and, above all, to various players within the neoliberal market. They carried out these transformations by positioning themselves in a certain tacit opposition to existing socialist artists organizations, and as a result—over recent decades—Artists Unions in particular have lost their previous role as the sole representatives of the interests of artists. Indeed, the Unions came to be regarded by many as outdated, unnecessarily rigid vestiges of totalitarianism, as an organizational model of the closed society, as a model that was too repressive and authoritarian, too collectivist or "tribal," to be entrusted with the protection of individual freedom of expression and creative liberties. The postsocialist new institutional model "center for contemporary art" was to differ in every respect from the socialist model; it was inspired by what Popper called the "impersonal institution."³⁸ Like other liberal thinkers, Popper distrusts strong personalities, seeing in them future tyrants and dictators. This view stood in opposition to that of Plato, who believed that in the state the stronger must rule the

38 Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 126 and 360.

weaker, and of Hegel, who saw world history as shaped by so-called “world historical individuals.” Instead Popper believes in well-designed *impersonal* institutions, in well-adjusted, well-maintained, and constantly improved institutional mechanisms led by professional managers—a view held also by his friend Friedrich Hayek, who, drawing on Adam Smith’s “invisible hand,” saw in the institutional impersonalism of the market a social panacea.³⁹

The SCCA program offered an early prototype of this type of capitalist impersonal institution, and ever since the SCCA program broke the ice in the early nineties, multiple impersonal mechanisms have come to represent the interests of postsocialist artists. They differ from the lingering Artists Unions in many crucial ways. Instead of providing a full range of conditions—both a livelihood and means of creation—as did the Unions (but of course at the expense of imposing censorship or restraints over individual expression)—the new model encourages absolute freedom, but provides only the “outward preconditions,”⁴⁰ in the form of grants or investments, to a limited number of artists; and, instead of relying on the state to support the large masses of artists, the new direction in cultural management seeks to develop a market economics-ready culture that would secure both government and corporate funding, to be redistributed to the most unique and successful artists. In the transformations carried out under the label “for contemporary art” one finds reflected some of the key theses of the discourse of transition, theses consistent with neoliberal rationality, which since the collapse of the Berlin Wall has assumed a hegemonic role in the postsocialist ideological vacuum. The field of cultural production, like other social fields, has been submitted to an economic

39 On impersonal institutions see Popper’s *Open Society* and Jeremy Shearmur, *The Political Thought of Karl Popper* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 53.

40 The expression “outward preconditions” comes from Ludwig von Mises’s best-known book, *Liberalism* (1927). Here is what he writes: “It is not from a disdain of spiritual goods that liberalism concerns itself exclusively with man’s material well-being, but from a conviction that what is highest and deepest in man cannot be touched by any outward regulation. [Liberalism] seeks to produce outer well-being because it knows that inner, spiritual riches cannot come to man from without, but only from within his own heart. It does not aim at creating anything but the outward preconditions for the development of the inner life.” Ludwig von Mises, *Liberalism: the Classical Tradition* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), p. xx. For a more detailed discussion of these “outward preconditions” see Octavian Eșanu, “On Artivism (In between Culture and Politics),” in *Umelec International*, vol. 15 (2-2011).

rationality; it has been liberalized and deregulated and made to function in accordance with the rules of the market. One of the many forms of critique to which the SCCAs had to answer during their decade of activities was that they did not engage a larger number of artists; they were often accused of being an elite club who served only a limited number of artists.⁴¹ Of course their mission to support the most innovative and radical forms of art could not have drawn large masses of artists, for artistic innovation or, rather, the ethos of the avant-garde that inspired the activities of these centers, is very individual and therefore much more restricted. Of course, the SCCAs did not operate with the same budgets as did the state-funded Artists Unions during socialism, and could not offer apartments or vacation tickets to their artists. But even on an ideological level they were not expected to do so. In the capitalist open society based on harsh competition, or in a society built in accordance with neoliberal political and economic rationality according to which the entire society is conceived as consisting of enterprise units (the person, the family, the group, the community), economic interests must always prevail.⁴² A center for contemporary art—as the name “center” itself suggests—was not predestined to support the masses or to address the concerns of all artists, as the word “union” would imply. Its main donee and privileged beneficiary is that sector of the elite regarded as the sole agent of change within the Western discourse of transition.

In Eastern Europe transitology has not yet been scrutinized with the same rigor as it was in other transitional areas of the world. In some countries of Latin America, where the “transition to democracy” and to the free market were performed by military juntas during the seventies, local intellectuals have frequently employed the concept of transition to analyze recent social transformations as well as to examine various cultural processes and artistic practices. In Chile, for example, sociologists, philosophers, artists, and art critics have often addressed Pinochet’s “transition to democracy” and the implementation of the free market. Tomás Moulian describes these traumatic historical events in terms of a capitalist counterrevolution that was called upon to perform a radical modernization. Willy Thayer,

41 I rely here on a document produced by the Open Society Institute for internal circulation. See Larisa Muravska, “Assessment/Mapping of Activities of the Soros Centers for Contemporary Arts” (Budapest, Open Society Institute, 2002).

42 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

on another hand, has brought the discussion of transition to the field of culture, suggesting that under the banner of transition to democracy the military junta enforced a critique of representation, carrying out a radical assault on the established codes of signification—a task that was once accomplished by the radical artistic avant-garde.⁴³ To rephrase Thayer's argument using the vocabulary of the Russian avant-garde: in Chile it was the military junta and not the artists who performed the descent to the "zero degree of form" or the radical *sdvig* of meaning (*smyslovoi sdvig*) on the political and economic levels. This is one way of understanding the art of transition. Discussing the art of transition in the countries of the Southern Cone (Chile and Argentina), Francine Masiello writes: "The art of transition thus evolves from duality and movement: a transition in political strategy from dictatorship to neoliberal democracy; a transition in cultural practices from focus on social class alone to matters of sexuality and gender; a transition in styles of representation that weave between modernist yearning and postmodernist pastiche."⁴⁴ This passage not only suggests that the art of transition may not be necessarily bounded only by the geographical or the temporal, but also that it may be regarded as a force field that emerges in between certain conflicting limits, betrayed by such spatial-temporal constructions as "before and after"—formulas that belong to the trope of transition.

In Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet republics, where the transition to new cultural models, codes, and forms of representation was relatively smooth and steady, the artists and critics have been less enthusiastic about beginning a critical appraisal of the broader mechanisms involved in these socioeconomic and cultural transformations. Despite significant differences in how the transition to liberal democracy unfolded in Eastern Europe and in other transitional regions of the world, much evidence suggests similarities and parallels. One could even state that what today goes by the name of "contemporary art" in the countries that have been traditionally considered at the peripheries of the "first world" cannot be understood separately from transitology—a discourse and a vehicle

⁴³ See Tomás Moulian, *Chile Actual: Anatomía de un Mito*, Colección Sin norte (Santiago, Chile: ARCIS Universidad: LOM Ediciones, 1997). Willy Thayer, "El golpe como consumación de la vanguardia" *Extremoccidente* no. 2 (2003): 54–58.

⁴⁴ Francine Masiello, *The Art of Transition: Latin American Culture and Neoliberal Crisis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 3.

through which Western, and in particular American postwar private and governmental agents have projected economic, political, but also cultural and artistic values to the "rest" of the world.

Chapter 5

[KD]'S JOURNEYS AFTER 1989

The overall impact of transitology on Russian political and economic life cannot be compared with its effects in other postsocialist countries and republics of the former USSR. This country's former status as superpower and the suspicious attitudes of the "reformed" elites toward every foreign project or initiative, as well as the resistance to Westernization traditional for this culture are among many factors that have imposed limits both theoretical and practical (or policy-making) on the neoliberal paradigm of democratization and modernization. This is not to say, however, that Russian political elites or political scientists ignored or neglected the impact of the Western transitological method on both the local political and social sciences as well as on the broader processes of liberalization.¹ Likewise, the effects of the Soros Foundation and of the Moscow SCCA programs on local culture were not as dramatic as they were in other post-Soviet countries.² This may be partially explained by the fact that in Moscow other Western foundations and councils also supported local art and culture. Nevertheless, the impact of the Soros Center in Russia cannot be ignored, for it was one of the main mechanisms of the cultural transitology, carrying out important new projects and initiatives independently, or as part of the broader efforts of the SCCA network.

The Latin word *transitio* refers to a "going across," "passing over," "passage," and even a "desertion" from one condition or state to another. "Desertion" is an appropriate word to describe the period with which

1 On the discussion of transitology within a Russian context see Vladimir Gel'man, *Transformatsiia v Rossii: politicheskii rezhim i demokraticeskaja oppozitsiia* (Moskva: Moskovskii obshchestvennyi nauchnyi fond, 1999). I

2 In Moscow the activities of the Soros Foundation were accompanied by a series of scandals that lasted throughout the nineties and into the present century. See for instance "Russia: Soros Foundation to leave. [Open Society Institute suspends services in Russia in wake of office building scandal]," IPR Strategic Business Information Database [2002]. http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/summary_0199-1884918_ITM [accessed February 22, 2009].

I will be concerned in this chapter, for it expresses that general state of abandonment, the general betrayal of what for almost seven decades was called “the USSR.” The peculiar temporality and duration of transition, as well as the chaotic state of desertion, influence the overall structure of this chapter, which does not proceed chronologically but topically. It divides the material of the after-*Journeys* into several subsectioned themes that vary in length, analyzing them from the perspective of the most important changes and adaptations that took place after 1989, when KD disintegrated and reunited again in 1995 as [KD].³ I have made the switch from a chronological or historical approach to a thematic one in order to suggest the nature of that posthistorical stage—often called postmodernism, the global world, or contemporaneity—in which many former Soviet citizens found themselves after 1989. A series of fragmentations and confusions that occurred in the post-1989 volumes of the *Journeys* are an expression of the convoluted temporality of transition, that time when it is believed that history itself has ended or has been abandoned. The post-Soviet *Journeys* were intended by their makers to amount to a consecutive, well-connected, and eloquent narrative, proceeding chronologically “book after book” or “phase after phase” from the Soviet eighties into the post-Soviet and Russian nineties.⁴ This intention, however, was compromised by the rupture of transition, a rupture that contributed to the choice of new words and concepts that entered the vocabulary of Moscow conceptualists during the 1990s; the new artistic media and means of public interaction toward which they were impelled; the new form of collectivity that emerged after 1989, altering the relations formed among the members of the group; a different way of journeying outside the city; the new configuration of Kievogorskoe Field; the new style of writing spectators’ reports; new observations, words, materials, places, events, people—all of which reflect the broader social change that takes place during the transition from socialism to capitalism.

3 Nowhere in the *Journeys* is it stated that KD broke up in 1989, but only that the artists stopped using the abbreviation KD to sign their post-1989 work (Monastyrsky, 1998, p. 783). However, in an electronic correspondence with the author, Monastyrsky confirmed that it is right to say that “in 1989 KD broke up (*raspustilsia*, *rasformirovalsia*) and the group reunited in 1995 as [KD].” A. Monastyrsky, e-mail message to author, February 25, 2009.

4 Monastyrsky, Foreword to Volume Seven. Monastyrsky, “Poezdki za gorod: 6–10 vols.” [unpaginated].

TEMPORALITY OF TRANSITION

KD's transition from its before- to its after-period took place over a period that loosely stretches from 1989 to 1995. This periodization is, however, approximate, one of the main reasons being the peculiar temporality of transition, which does not flow in a linear and sequential pattern but appears to twist back upon itself, moving among confused temporal residues and agglutinations. If the first five volumes showed a smooth chronology of actions and events, then the post-1989 actions, volumes, and phases evolved according to the new logic in which the group was caught up during its transition from KD to [KD] between 1989 and 1995.⁵

The turn of the eighties and the early nineties is described across various disciplines in terms of a historical "limbo," a time when it seemed as if the very notion of time had been abolished by some new global transnational authority. The space once called the USSR was immersed in a political vacuum: the old power was no longer effective and the new one was not yet in effect. Writers often used the metaphor of the Romanian flag with the black hole in the middle (the same black hole that pierced the Hungarian flag in 1956) to describe this sublime historical moment of the vacuum of power.⁶ Many in Eastern Europe thought at the time that this was the moment of truth, the moment when the many contradictions that had plagued this region for centuries would finally be resolved. Local and foreign politicians and public figures sensationally spoke of the end of history, of a time when the wars, revolutions, and calamities of centuries would be no more. The American historian Francis Fukuyama, for instance, prophesized a spectacular end of history, arguing that the twentieth century's radical social ideologies had finally been negated, and, in a Hegelian way, sublated, absorbed, or reconciled dialectically within the triumphant liberal democracy, which was expanding rapidly on a global level.⁷ Many other theories of the end were in vogue at the time.

5 Although the artists used their name in square brackets [KD] only for two years (1995–97), I will sometimes use this transliteration to differentiate between KD before and after 1989.

6 See, for instance Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).

7 See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, Toronto: Free Press; Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1992).

Extending through various disciplines, they produced an entire gamut of ends (e.g. of art, of man, of utopia, of the author), shocking many post-Soviet intellectuals who were still used to treating the printed page with Byzantine awe.

In spite of the proliferation of ends, the turn of the nineties was also a time of many new beginnings. Russian art historians and critics are still debating whether to place the beginning of the transition to a new cultural pro-Western model in the year 1988 (the year of the Sotheby's auction); in 1989, the more symbolically charged year of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the beginning of the transition to market democracy for many countries around the globe; or in 1991, the year of the disintegration of the USSR. Some propose to set the beginning of the new epoch in Russian art, on the other hand, in 1990, arguing that it was in this year most of the radical changes took place within the Moscow art infrastructure.⁸ 1990 was the year that the greatest number of officially registered artists' associations and organizations were formed, with many artists establishing new alternative spaces in what was not yet part of the highly profitable Moscow real estate business; it was also the year that it became clear that in order to be able to maintain a dialogue with the Western art world, the Muscovites needed to create their own domestic institutional system of contemporary art. 1990 was the year that the first Contemporary Art Center and Institute was planned, and the first Museum of Contemporary Art (Tsaritsyno) was opened; the year that the Soviet state made its first acquisitions of nonconformist or unofficial art; the year that the artists and their public interacted not in galleries and museums but in the streets and in unlawfully occupied buildings discussing and arguing about art; the year that many Moscow artists found their ideal spectator—the anonymous yet participating spectator (to use KD's vocabulary); it was, finally, the year that the first private contemporary art galleries began to emerge (Aidan Salakhova's "First Gallery" [*Pervaia Galerea*] in 1989, and "Guelman Gallery" and "Regina" in 1990).⁹

⁸ For an example of literature that discusses the chronology of transition in Russian art see Natalia Sarkisian, "Eiforia: nastroyenie i transformatsii art-soobshchestva v 1990 godu," *Zhurnal'nyi zal: NLO*, no. 83 (2007). <http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2007/83/sa39-pr.html> [accessed December 1, 2008].

⁹ Ibid., 6.

This was the general atmosphere among the former circles of unofficial artists at the turn of the nineties and until the middle of the decade. Despite rumors of the end of history and of art, many were very busy participating in all sorts of new activities and events organized at home and abroad. Like many other unofficial artists, the Moscow conceptualists traveled and exhibited intensely, mostly in the West. Numerous contemporary art centers and *kunstvereins* showed new art from the “Eastern bloc” to the Western public, exhibiting these artists at one time or another as Soviet nonconformists, Russian contemporary artists, or Moscow conceptualists. The confusion that persisted in these critical and art historical categories was also manifest in the chronology of the *Journeys* from the after-period.

Throughout his post-1989 texts, Monastyrsky often expresses his desire to avoid experimenting with history, insisting that he prefers to keep the flow of time logical, chronological, or consequential without unexplainable gaps or overlaps. This is, however, a preference with which the nature of transitional time interfered. In the foreword to the seventh volume, Monastyrsky pondered upon a problem that concerns the periodization of the *Journeys* after 1989.¹⁰ The problem revolves around the following contradiction: although the group actually ceased to exist in 1989, journeys or actions in the style of KD continued to take place uninterrupted throughout the early nineties. This contradiction is tied to the first major fragmentation of KD, which triggered many others in turn. To address this paradox one must make a clear distinction between KD, the group of Moscow conceptualists, and *Journeys Outside the City*, the group's register of its artistic and aesthetic activities. When, in 1988, a handwritten copy of the *Journeys* was sold to a Western collector, it signaled a certain distancing, as if a symbolic emptiness had settled in and separated the group's aesthetic almanac from its producers, distancing the artists in the meantime from their actions. Despite the group's disbandment two former members (Monastyrsky and Hänsen) continued to make collective actions during the first half of the nineties. Thus, the problem that Monastyrsky needed to solve ten years later, when he began to assemble the continuation of the *Journeys*, was the following: should these actions be considered part of the *Journeys'* next, sixth volume, or were they to be

10 Monastyrsky, “Poezdki za gorod: 6–10 vols.” [unpaginated].

kept apart as individual works? In other words, should these works, which consisted predominantly of videos made by Monastyrsky (the group's self-proclaimed leader) and Hänsen (the last member to join KD in 1987, and Monastyrsky's wife at the time) be considered collective actions?

In 2002, when Monastyrsky re-edited the forward to the seventh volume, he decided to count these works as part of KD's sixth phase (1991–94), also proposing a new chronology of the post-Soviet *Journeys*. In order to avoid inconsistencies and contradictions, he decided to abandon a commonsensical chronological order, and placed the actions of the sixth volume after those of the seventh. The temporal sequence of KD's aesthetic system during the transition from socialism to capitalism proceeds in the following order: Volume 7 (1995–99), Volume 6 (1991–94), Volume 8 (1999–2003), Volume 9 (2003–2006), and Volume 10 (2006–2008). The yearly chronology of the actions organized during this period is recorded as follows: 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1990, 1995, and so forth.¹¹

The transitional disruption of orderly and chronological time must have been especially difficult for Monastyrsky, who in spite of his openness to the mystical and the absurd is respectful of history. He often regretfully compares the loose chronology of the nineties, with its temporal lapses and lacunae, to the consecutive, continuous, uninterrupted, and compact phases and volumes of the before-period, to which he often nostalgically referred as the "compact period" (*plotnyi period*), or "classical KD."¹² The volumes that separate the fifth volume from the eighth appear in contrast patched and mended. This part of the *Journeys* may serve as an illustration of the concept of transition, which philosophers have used synonymously with such concepts as mediation, negation and becoming, or like Søren Kierkegaard, used it to describe the state of *kinesis* (movement) from possibility to actuality.¹³ Historians have employed the notion of transition to speak of temporal leaps, historical breaks, suspensions, fluxes, shifts, ruptures, transformations, changes, metamorphoses, and various conversions and bifurcations. The skipping and lapsing in the chronology

11 See the post-1989 order of actions (1989–95) at <http://conceptualism.letov.ru/KD-actions.html>

12 Foreword to Volume Seven in Monastyrsky, "Poezdki za gorod: 6–10 vols." [unpaginated].

13 For some remarks on the concept of "transition" see the chapter "The Concept of Anxiety" in Søren Kierkegaard, Jonathan Rée, and Jane Chamberlain, *The Kierkegaard Reader* (Oxford; Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 193–6.

of the *Journeys* during the first half of the nineties suggests a violence, anxiety, or unrest that alters meaning, order, and reason. Regarded from the perspective of all ten volumes of *Journeys Outside the City* produced by these artists to date, only the interfused sixth and seventh volumes, which account for actions organized from 1990 to 1995, may be called transitional.

One way in which the arrangement of the 1990s volumes of the *Journeys* reveals the peculiar temporality of transition is in the “shape” of their order: cut sharp at one end, and loose, indefinite, and uncertain at the other. The before, or Soviet period of KD is firmly established, standing clearly materialized in the first five books of the *Journeys* as the artists had always envisioned. The after-period of the *Journeys* is still “unfastened,” resembling an open-ended field of possibilities. The material, moreover, is available only online and its electronic virtuality does not possess the same clear materiality and self-determination of the previous five volumes, which were printed in book format thanks to financial support from the SCCA Moscow. While the transition has a clear beginning (1989) it lacks a clear end, suggesting that the after-period of transition awaits its historical moment to become a new before, as it sediments into new historic material. Likewise, the historical Soviet Union concluded symbolically in 1989 and *de facto* in 1991, when the USSR broke apart and the transition to capitalism began. However, it is more complicated to determine the end of this transition, for the question of whether Russia has fully emerged to embrace a democratic model, as well as the new pro-Western values prescribed by transitology, is still widely debated.¹⁴

NEW SCHIZO-TERMS IN THE *DICTIONARY*

After 1989 the lexicon of Moscow Conceptualism was populated by a series of new words. Some of these words, beginning with the prefix “schizo-”, emerged in the late eighties when the philosopher Mikhail Ryklin translated and published an abridged version of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (the only

14 A large body of literature exists on this topic. See for instance one of the most recent books by Lilia Fedorovna Shevtsova, *Russia—Lost in Transition: The Yeltsin and Putin Legacies*.

available version of this work in Russian to date).¹⁵ The conceptualists were inspired by this work's central concept of "schizoanalysis," often applying it to describe or express their own practice, as well to form their own terminology, such as: "schizo-illustration," "schizo-China," or "schizo-analytical places of Moscow and the Moscow Region." However, unlike many terms from the before-period, including "empty actions," or "demonstrative" and "exposition fields" (regularly deployed to describe and analyze actions), the schizo- concepts were treated inconsistently. References to the schizo- terms appear here and there throughout the seventh and the eighth volumes, but nowhere are they clearly explained nor is it even demonstrated how to handle them, which is not unusual given the propensity of the conceptualists to leave many terms undefined. They are nevertheless important from a sociological perspective, for they convey a number of concerns and processes that surfaced in the after-period of the *Journeys*. The overall sense of fragmentation and splitting is felt on many levels of the post-1989 *Journeys*. It transpires above all in the altered relations among the members of [KD], in the temporal gaps of their chronology, but is also manifest in other elements and practices discussed below.

Fragmentation was also an issue for the Moscow conceptualists during the Soviet period, but in a different way. At the time the schism ran along fundamental questions of ideology, with Soviet artists divided into official or unofficial, depending on the side they took with regard to the invasive general line of the Party. For example, in the eighties Moscow conceptualists used in their lexicon the concept "artist-character," later extended to include "spectator-character" and "critic-character."¹⁶ The "character" part of these terms refers to a theatrical persona (*personazh*), and was used by artists to express the sense of duality that persisted in the everyday life of Soviet citizens. In some of his writings from that period Kabakov described this schism in terms of a parallel life, in which one worked during the day for the state and in the evening for oneself. Various "characters" already inhabited his drawings during the seventies, and later in the eighties they moved into the communal space of the Soviet apartments recreated in his installations. In his memories he often

¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kapitalizm i shizofrenia: Anti-Oedipus*, trans. M. K. Ryklin [Moscow: INION, 1990].

¹⁶ For schizo-terms and "Artist-character" see also the Appendix.

describes the schism that divided the life of the Moscow unofficial artist.

[The] third type to which I belong are the doubled figures, who look, on the one hand, like normal Soviet citizens but who also live a second life exhibiting at different unofficial exhibitions, not drawing what they were supposed to, selling their work where they were not expected to, and so forth. This “doubling” is directly related to the problem of literary characters. The very existence of characters was related to the division of reality: within the unofficial circles you were not supposed to speak about your official membership in the Union of Artists, about official commissions, because this was simply indecent. But it was equally indecent to speak in your official workplace, in the publishing house for instance, about your unofficial work as social schizophrenia.¹⁷

The appearance of new schizo- words in the vocabulary of KD suggests, however, that this big Soviet divide that Kabakov mentions, the great schism that conditioned the Soviet citizen to wear a mask in order to defend him or herself from the unabashed intrusiveness of the state, had been replaced by more minuscule schisms. One significant intellectual divide after 1989 concerned the relation of Moscow artists to the West. The dichotomous concepts “Russia” and the “West” (*zapad*) entered the *Dictionary* of Moscow conceptualists in the first half of the nineties. These two terms appeared after the translation and publication in 1993 of Groys’s article “Russia as the Unconscious of the West” (*Rossia kak podsoznanie Zapada*).¹⁸ After the collapse of the USSR the theme of Russia’s identity and its place in the world returned to the center of the country’s intellectual life.¹⁹ In his article Groys defined “Russia” as the place where a number of destructive processes of Western civilization are summoned and conserved. The instinctual “Russia” is the dark, self-destructive unconscious composed of repressed and forbidden impulses, which resists the rationality of the always conscious

17 Kabakov et al., *Dialogi: 1990-1994*, 57.

18 Groys, *Utopia i obmen*.

19 Once again, like before the October revolution, the intellectual life of Russia’s two capitals was divided between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers. This becomes particularly clear at the turn of the century, when the artistic scene became polarized and fragmented into various anti-Western cultural and political fractions (e.g., the Euroasian nationalists, the National Bolsheviks).

and lucid “West.” The Russia/West dichotomy is constructed around an idea Groys had already introduced in the late seventies, when he defined Moscow Conceptualism as a “romantic” and more spiritual movement in contrast to the rationalism of its Western counterpart (see Part I). If Groys’ late seventies critical distinctions were constructed according to the cultural opposites “romantic” versus “rationalist,” or “spiritual” versus “positivist” and “pragmatic,” then in the nineties the “Russia/West” dichotomy is incorporated within the discipline of psychoanalysis. The “West” takes towards “Russia” the critical and moralizing function of the superego. Groys even finds similarities between Freudian psychoanalysis and the Russian Slavophiles’ “Russian Idea,”²⁰ suggesting that the two theories emerged in order to help the Central European Jews and the Russians to resist the growing pressure of Western cultural imperialism.²¹

It was not accidental then that the “Russia” versus “West” dichotomy entered the vocabulary of Moscow conceptualists in the first half of the 1990s, when many of these artists were living a nomadic lifestyle, split in between Moscow and any one of a number of Western cities, and others had moved and settled permanently abroad. The dichotomy “Russia/West” appeared in order to signal a new turn in the relation between Russian intellectuals and the West. In Soviet times, the artists had certainly kept their eyes fixed on the West, and the tradition of Moscow Conceptualism emerged in part as an imaginary dialogue with Western art. But in the before-period, the West was far less real. Groys writes: “that West with which Russian culture wanted to identify itself is not by any means the real West but a Russian phantasm that does not exist outside Russia.”²² This was particularly the case in the Soviet period, for though the artists knew that the “West” existed somewhere, they had never experienced it in reality but as imaginary, either through the tinny Voice of America interrupted by the static of the short-wave radio, or in the glossy pages of art magazines and large coffee-table art books brought into the country by visitors or the personnel of the foreign embassies in exchange for nonconformist Soviet art.

20 The “Russian Idea” refers to Nikolai Berdyaev’s theorization of freedom. In contrast to liberal individual freedom, or personalism, the Russian Idea regards freedom as part of Christian community, which is often understood through the concept of *sobornost’*.

21 Groys, *Utopia i obmen*, 245–58.

22 Kabakov et al., *Dialogi: 1990–1994*, 79.

A discussion that revolves around unofficial art must not ignore the role played by Western media and cultural products. To stress, for example, the role that such foreign books played for the unofficial artists in the Soviet period, Estonian art historian Sirje Helme coined the term “repro-avant-garde.”²³ Often such a form of acquiring information—by looking at Western reproductions—led to misunderstanding, but this often made things more interesting. Recently, for example, Hungarian art historians have spoken of a “fruitful misunderstanding” of Pop Art in Hungary during the sixties, when, under the influence of Western advertising and media reproductions, local artists started to make pop-art-like paintings using motifs from the local world of folk and native peasant traditions.²⁴ The irony and the paradox of this situation is that these artists resorted to an artistic form that had emerged in response to the new cultural conditions occasioned by the rise of the Western consumer mass society in order to represent values and beliefs associated with a traditional society. In Moscow the situation was in many respects similar, and Moscow Conceptualism itself has often been regarded as part of a “fruitful misunderstanding” of Western conceptual art by local artists.²⁵

The “Russia/West” dichotomy in the vocabulary of the Moscow conceptualists was a sign that this relation had begun to change. Gradually the phantasm “West” became more real as artists began to learn and experience it in their everyday lives. It was not accidental that the members of KD decided to reunite in 1995. That year marked the end of a period of intense interest in post-Soviet art, a period which had begun in 1988 when the Sotheby’s house opened a window for many Western collectors, curators, and managers of contemporary art institutions. Toward the middle of the decade, as the shock of the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union began to fade, many foreigners began to lose interest in Russian art, redirecting their attention toward other transitional regions of the world where more interesting processes were taking place. Artists, faced with

23 Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge, *Art of the Baltics: The Struggle for Freedom of Artistic Expression under the Soviets, 1945–1991* (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, Jan Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 2001), 168.

24 See for instance Andrasi Gabor et al., *The History of Hungarian Art in the Twentieth Century* (Budapest: Corvina, 1999), 171.

25 For an outright denial of the existence of a native Moscow conceptualism see Alexeev in Donskoy et al., *Gnezdo (The Nest)*, 21.

the first capitalist recession in their lives, began to return to their pre-Sotheby's activities.²⁶

The appearance of the "Russia/West" terms in the vocabulary of the conceptualists also marked the beginning of a new stage in the relation of these artists to the previous phantasm. As the West began to lose interest in Russian art, many artists began to change and then to express their own attitudes toward what they now perceived, rightly or wrongly, as the "real West." The 1994 exhibition *Interpol*, also called the "art show that divided East and West," was remembered for the scandalous accidents involving the Israeli-Russian poet and artist Alexander Brener and the Russian-Ukrainian artist Oleg Kulik. In this international contemporary art exhibition organized in Stockholm, Brener destroyed the installation of the Chinese-American Wenda Gu; whereas Kulik took the role of the artist-dog and violently attacked and bit a spectator who had transgressed upon the territory that Kulik had marked as his own, ignoring his sign "Danger!"²⁷ These accidents led to a collective protest against Brener and Kulik by the Western participants in *Interpol* and by the Swedish public, as well as to a new phase in the relations between Russian and Western art.

This incident is suggestive of certain other aspects of the cultural dialogue between the West and the rest of world. Groys, for instance, argues that during the most critical phases in the history of Western art its practitioners turned for insight and inspiration to the culture of the "other," to the non-Western or the "primitive" at the peripheries, hoping to find new solutions.²⁸ The European historical avant-garde provides a good example of how artists in the West turned to the African mask and to the Japanese gravure in order to find ways out of the cultural impasse in which Western Europe found itself at the turn of the nineteenth century. The end of the eighties, argues Groys, was similar in many respects to the situation at the beginning of the twentieth century: many had hoped to find in the unofficial art and culture of the USSR new opportunities to revive Western art.

26 "Already by 1995 in the West there was a lack of interest in Soviet art. Those who did not sink as low as to constantly reproduce their earlier works, constantly searching for new markets, returned to their previous activities." See Panitkov's text "About the Actions of the Seventh Volume of the Journeys Outside the City" (*Ob aktsiakh 7 toma 'Poezdok za gorod'*) in Monastyrsky, "Poezdki za gorod: 6–10 vols." [unpaginated].

27 See "An Open Letter to the Art World" in Eda Cufer and Viktor Misiano, eds., *Interpol: The Art Show which divided East and West* (Ljubljana: IRWIN, Moscow Art Magazine, 2000).

28 Kabakov et al., *Dialogi: 1990–1994*, 81.

The West was looking for a new form. The West expected from Russian artists just such a new form because it had naively assumed that the Russians followed their own alternative way of development. These expectations formed a major impetus to the reception of Russian art in the West—which did not receive the desired new form, after all, but only a new content in which the West was never particularly interested.²⁹

Thus the “Russia/West” dichotomy contains mutual disappointment. The West did not receive what it had looked for, and Russia, or at least some circles within Moscow Conceptualism, realized that their aesthetic discoveries were of little interest to an otherwise self-contained Western culture. In 1992 Monastyrsky and Hänsen suggested the term “Local-Lore-ness” ([*Kraevedenost'*]) which perfectly renders a situation in which the Moscow conceptualists were presented in the West in public displays that resembled ethnographic exhibitions at the Museum of Natural History more than in exhibitions of contemporary conceptual art.³⁰ Western curators and the public could not easily comprehend the problematic with which KD or the Inspection Medical Hermeneutics group—the most hermetic and self-referential of the Moscow conceptualists—were dealing, favoring instead those conceptualists who spoke in more recognizable visual idioms. The “Russia/West” dichotomy is the realization among the conceptualists that Moscow may be the capital of a vast empire, but an empire that exists at the periphery, as the political scientist Boris Kagarlitsky has recently put it.³¹

BRACKETED TOTALITY: FROM KD TO [KD]

At the turn of the 1990s some of the unofficial artist groups that had functioned during Soviet times began to fall apart. The main reasons for their disintegration were related, paradoxically as it may appear at first sight, to the increased opportunities offered to these artists by new galleries of contemporary art and many other private or public cultural

29 Ibid.

30 Monastyrsky, “Poezdki za gorod: 6–10 vols.” [unpaginated].

31 Boris Kagarlitsky, *Empire of the Periphery: Russia and the World System* (London; Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2008).

foundations. Many have suggested that it was these new possibilities, which began with the Sotheby's auction in 1988, that should be held accountable for the rapid deterioration of cordial relations among unofficial artists in general, and among the members of certain artist groups in particular.³² One of the main reasons behind the breakup of many artist groups was the difficulty of equally dividing credit for collectively accomplished works. The case of the Moscow collective "Champions of the World" (*Chempiony mira*), which broke up in the late eighties, has often been offered as an illustration of the artists' schisms over the issue of collective property.³³ Although the division of property was not the main cause behind KD's 1989 divorce, the issue of splitting the shares of collective authorship was one of the concerns of the after-1989 *Journeys*.

The very last page of the before-*Journeys* is called "The Activities of the Group after 1989." Here Monastyrsky announces that "after finishing the fifth volume of *Journeys Outside the City* the members of the group decided in the future not to sign new actions with the name "Collective Actions," but to use instead the "list-of-authors" (*spisok avtorov*) principle used before 1980."³⁴ In the same text (signed in 1997) Monastyrsky announces that, "starting in 1995 the group reunited and resumed its work under a slightly modified name [KD] (the acronym KD in square brackets)."³⁵ The new orthography not only suggests the re-emergence of the artists from their six-year transitional period, but also the emergence of a new and [bracketed] form of collectivity.³⁶ Monastyrsky does not discuss the new orthography, but suggests only that the square brackets around their old name indicate the group's incompleteness. Indeed, the first page of the seventh volume lists only six members who returned to practice collective

32 On this issue see Solomon, *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost*.

33 The artist group "Champions of the World" (*Chempiony mira*) followed the same steps as KD. "For some time we tried to stay together, signing our work with the label 'Champions of the World' independently of who made it. The truth is that Kostea Latyshev categorically refused this principle and began to sign with his name." Sarkisian, "Eiforia: nastroyenie i transformatsii art-soobshchestva v 1990 godu," n. 24.

34 Andrei Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 783.

35 Ibid.

36 In 1997, after the action "The Participants' Report" (*Rasskazy uchastnikov*), the artists decided to drop the square brackets. I will still keep them in order to distinguish the socialist from the post-socialist KD.

actions.³⁷ The brackets also express the new conditions under which the artists decided to reunite, as well as the fact that the very notion of collectivity had acquired another meaning in post-Soviet Moscow.

During the six years that KD took to become [KD], Eastern Europe went through a series of historic events—from the fall of Berlin Wall to the breaking up of the USSR and of the Warsaw Pact. Officially, Russia also declared its readiness to embark on the new path of the capitalist transition, but soon it became increasingly evident that instead of advancing straight toward democracy and the free market, it was drifting to the side or even making U-turns, compelling Western observers and political scientists to question whether Russia was taking the tenets of transitology seriously.³⁸ Both economically and politically, the results of transition were not encouraging. The political transition, which was expected to result in free and fair multiparty elections, led instead to a more camouflaged form of “unipartism,” and in the economy the process of redistribution of collective resources initially led to an apparatchik-mafia oligarchic capitalism, soon to be drawn back into another form of a state-controlled economy. The history of KD as a collective follows in some respects a similar trajectory (without its criminal aspect): from disunion and independence to the redistribution of artistic assets and the reunification of its members under a new form of contract. The square brackets around KD after 1989 stand for a new form of contractual relation that binds the members of this group.

A bracketed collectivity had already surfaced in the last pages of the appendix to the before-*Journeys*. The section “General Remarks” (*Obschie primechania*) also contains several short texts by Monastyrsky concerned with more technical aspects of the *Journeys*. At the turn of the decade, the transition of the Soviet Union to capitalism began with the abolishment or redistribution of collective economic assets. As if anticipating these social and political developments, two of KD’s former members had begun in 1990 to divide the communal property of the group into individual shares. In the text called “Authorship” (*Avtorstvo*) Monastyrsky explains the principle

37 Alexeev and Kizevalter participated only occasionally in the after-period. See Foreword to Volume Seven in Monastyrsky, “Poezdki za gorod: 6–10 vols.” [unpaginated].

38 Although the discourse of transitology was not as influential in Russia as it was in other Eastern European countries and republics of the former USSR, it nevertheless played an important role in this country’s economic and political transformations. See Gel’mán, *Transformatsiia v Rossii: politicheskii rezhim i demokraticeskaja oppozitsiia*.

according to which he and Panitkov calculated the so-called “percentages of authorship” (*avtorskie protsenty*), which they did in order to deduce each member’s contribution to all the collective actions organized during the Soviet period.

In 1990 N. Panitkov and A. Monastyrsky completed the document “percentages of authorship” of KD’s actions, using for the calculation the following method of evaluation: a) For the authorship of the plot (*siuzhet*) without a coauthor – 6 (points). b) For the authorship of the plot with a co-author – 4 (in one case – 5). c) For the coauthorship in the elaboration of the plot – 2. d) For the greatest expenditure of energy in the preparation and performance of the action – 1,5. e) For considerable help in the organization and performance of the action – 1. f) For help in the organization and performance of the action – 0,5. According to this evaluation principle “KD’s shares” have been distributed in the following way: A.M. – 53%, N.P. – 16% N.A.– 6%, I.M. – 6%, E.E.– 6%, G.K. – 5%, S.R. – 5%, S.H. – 3%...³⁹

After completing the distribution of the shares among the eight members of KD, Monastyrsky lists all sixty-one actions organized during their Soviet period, and then performs a similar task with the spectator-participants. He provides a list of all guests who attended KD actions (about sixty people), indicating in front of the name of each person the number of actions in which he or she participated. At the top of the list are Backstein, with twenty-five attended actions; Kabakov, with twenty-two; and the writer Vladimir Sorokin, with eighteen.⁴⁰

In the after-1989 *Journeys* the practice of calculating and dividing percentages, and of constructing indexes of collective actions, became more elaborate and complex. Documents annexed at the end of the seventh volume (1995–99) indicate a more detailed approach to the indexing of authorship percentages, where Monastyrsky takes into account

39 Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 779. The initials stand for the following members of KD: A.M. – Andrei Monastyrsky, N.P. – Nikolai Panitkov, N.A. – Nikita Alexeev, I.M. – Igor Makarevich, E.E. Elena Elagina, G.K. Georgii Kizevalter, S.R. – Sergei Romashko, S.H. – Sabine Hänsen

40 Ibid., 781.

more details and subtleties. If such activities as “sending invitations to the guests” or “collecting the participants’ reports” are not usually indexed or taken into account, then contributions such as “meeting the spectators,” “photographing the action,” “purchasing various things for the action,” “participating critically in the action,” or “offering one’s apartment or studio for the action” each add 0.5 points to the overall percentage of authorship. “Participation in the plot,” “participation in the discussion of the plan of action,” and the “production of objects for the action” add another 1.5 points to the index of participation in the action.⁴¹ The highest amount of points (6) was given, as in the 1990s, to single authorship. The section “Indexes KD” (*Indeksy KD*) lists seventy-five actions, organized from 1976 to 1999, where each action is calculated according to the percentage of involvement of each member. From the perspective of the end of the century the authorship of the first action *Appearance* (1976) appears in the following way: “1. APPEARANCE – Monastyrsky – 4, Rubinstein, Alexeev – 1,5, Kizevalter – 0,5.” The sum total of KD’s actions to the year 2000 equals 686 (100%). The largest share of KD authorship (348.5) belongs to Monastyrsky, followed by Panitkov (105), Alexeev (39), Makarevich (41,5), Elagina (40,5), Kizevalter (41), Romashko (41), and Hänsen (29,5). A note closing this section states that these numbers also express the intensity of each artist’s participation in the actions.⁴²

This distribution of artistic responsibility, this division of artistic and critical labor reveals the changing character of interpersonal relations within this collective after 1989. The process should, no doubt, be considered within the larger context of the socio-economic transformations of the nineties when the collective resources (factories, plants, mines, collective farms) underwent a large-scale process of privatization that led to the redistribution of assets among the new class of entrepreneurs and oligarchs, resulting in a new social contract and the alteration of the social bonds among the citizens of the former USSR. Likewise, certain transformations take place within artistic and cultural circles that may be understood by considering some of the new terms that began to circulate within these circles and certain subcultural milieux during the 1990s.

41 “Indexes KD” (*Indexy KD*) at the end of the Seventh Volume. Monastyrsky, “Poezdki za gorod: 6–10 vols.” [unpaginated].

42 Ibid.

The mutations that took place within the fabric of artistic collectivity appear above all on the level of vocabulary. In the Soviet period, for example, the official and therefore prevalent form of artistic association was the Union of Artists. The “Unions” (*soyuz*)—a word that appears in the names of most institutions in the USSR, including the very name of the country—were organizations much like trade unions, divided into various departments and organized around an artistic medium (painting, sculpture, and so forth). To be a member of the Union of Artists one had to be committed, at least formally, to its ideological, aesthetic, and ethical codes. In exchange the artists received such benefits as state commissions and purchases, studios, and exhibition space.⁴³ There were also unofficial forms of artistic collectivity, to which KD and other circles of Moscow conceptualists belonged. These were often defined as “groups” (*gruppa*)—a word that entered the artistic lexicon in the early sixties and was used by many of those artists who chose to form alliances in order to oppose the ideological supremacy of the state and its artistic Unions.⁴⁴ One should however make a distinction among the “groups” themselves, for the forms of collective solidarity that bound its members differed from one generation to another.

Russian critics have recently distinguished among various forms of artistic collectivities that existed during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods.⁴⁵ Following Evgenii Barabanov, one may differentiate between the artistic “association” or *sodruzhestvo*, and “collaboration” or *sotrudnichestvo*.⁴⁶ The generation of modernists of the sixties and seventies (the predecessors of the Moscow conceptualists) were united according to the bohemian nineteenth-century model of the artist “association,” *sodruzhestvo*—a term based on the root word *drug* (friend). This is the form of collective solidarity based on friendship, and it was this confident trust in each other’s sincerity that permitted the modernists of the sixties to organize a series of precarious antiestablishment actions, such as the Bulldozer Exhibition

⁴³ For a more detailed examination of the Soviet Unions of Artists see Lazarev, M. “The Organization of Artists’ Work in the U.S.S.R.” *Leonardo* 12, no. 2 (1979): 107–09.

⁴⁴ See also Part I.

⁴⁵ In this section I draw upon the discussion organized by *Moscow Art Journal* and published under the title “From *Tusovka* to Corporation.” See Viktor Misiano et al. “Ot tusovki k korporatsii.” *Khudozhestvennyi zhurnal* 41 (2001). <http://xz.gif.ru/numbers/41/tusovka-corporation/> [accessed January 16, 2009], 2.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

of 1974. The collective relations formed among the next generation of Moscow artists, to which KD and other Moscow conceptualists belonged, is “collaboration.” *Sotrudnichestvo*, like collaboration in English, is joint action directed at a collectively desired end: a product, article, or work. Examples of artistic collaboration from this period include KD’s *Journeys*, the MANI archive of the Moscow conceptualists, and the *A-Ya* journal published abroad.⁴⁷

The new form of collectivity that began to take shape during the nineties, and that came to replace the model of “association” predominant in the sixties and early seventies as well as the “collaborations” of the late seventies and eighties, is called *tusovka*. One does not encounter this term in more respectable dictionaries of the Russian language, and neither is it catalogued in the Moscow conceptualists’ *Dictionary*; it is more often found in dictionaries of slang or prison jargon, or in other unconventional lexicographical literature. In its verbal form *tusovatsea* means to “hang out,” or to gather together in a group in order to dedicate some time to one or another form of amusement. As a noun *tusovka* refers to that form of collectivity that emerges when various individuals come to unite into such a gathering, or when individuals come to “hang out.” The word was used among the Soviet hippies in the late seventies and became especially popular at the end of the eighties and the early nineties in differentiating among multiple subculture groupings, such as the “punk-rock *tusovka*,” the “bikers-*tusovka*,” and the “skinheads *tusovka*.”⁴⁸ From the nineties on, *tusovka* spread in all the spheres of social life, and was soon adopted by politicians, businessmen and the cultural elites. The word’s etymology is presumed to be *tasovanie*, which means “to shuffle the cards,” and the term entered the cultural and political milieus from the very margins of society, from the criminal world, where *tusovka* had been used since the 1920s to refer to a “scandal,” a “scuffle,” a “meeting of thieves,” or a “feast of criminal elements.”⁴⁹

47 It must, however, be added that as abstract concepts used to describe various forms of artistic collectivity, collaboration (*sotrudnichestvo*) and association (*sodruzhestvo*) are not always clearly cut. In KD’s case, the relations established among its members could not be made always to clearly fit under one category or another.

48 For a more detailed discussion of the term *tusovka* see M. Grachev and V. M. Mokienko, *Russkii zhargon: Istoriko-etimologicheskii slovar’* (Moskva: AST-Press, 2008), 242–6.

49 Ibid., 245

Tusovka, like a deck of cards, like a group of thieves, or a hippie festival, is a sum of autonomous and independent individuals each of whom acts according to his suit, according to the tricks of the criminal trade and to his or her food, drugs, or musical preferences. To better perceive the differences between *tusovka*, on the one hand, and *sodruzhestvo* – *sotrudnichestvo* (association and collaboration), on the other, it may be useful to mention two broad sociological categories that have been widely used among sociologists to distinguish between certain historical types of human association.

The sociological categories *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* refer to two different kinds of social formations. Whereas *Gemeinschaft* translates into English as “community,” *Gesellschaft* is rendered as “association,” “society,” and more recently as “civil society.”⁵⁰ The *Gemeinschaft* – *Gesellschaft* types are drawn along the distinction between the preindustrial and the industrial, or modern form of social integration. Although these metacategories may be too broad to apply to more confined subcultural groups, some of their essential qualities may be useful for understanding forms of conduct encountered within small artistic societies. For instance, as a member of a community (*Gemeinschaft*) my individual will is directed toward the general will of the community, and my individual life is regulated by the mores, beliefs, and practices of the community in which I live. An artistic *sodruzhestvo* (association)—especially in its Russian meaning in which the word *drug* (friend) forms the root of this word—would be closer to this form of social solidarity, for in it the individual dissolves in the collective, whose members submit their personal preferences and interests to a shared collective will, to a meaning that emerges only from within that unity. The artist association, which emerged during the nineteenth century under the impact of modern socialist ideas and which some sociologists of art understood as part of a process of alienation of the intelligentsia from the rest of society, is best exemplified by the Barbizon school, or the impressionist artists’ colonies of the nineteenth century, which were based on social rather than aesthetic principles; here the moral obligations of

50 For a more detailed examination of these concepts see Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community & Society* (*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*) (New York: Harper & Row, 1963). A more recent English translation of this book is Ferdinand Tönnies and José Harris, *Community and Civil Society* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

the community and the devotion to one's craft, as well as the belief in the universal role of art, prevailed over aesthetic theory and the proclamation of new radical theses.⁵¹ This was indeed the collective type of the Soviet dissident modernists of the post–World War II period.

The form of collaborative (*sotrudnichestvo*) collectivity that developed during the late Soviet period, but especially the *tusovka* type of the post-Soviet nineties, gathers a series of features that correspond to the *Gesellschaft* category. According to this social type, I as an individual have an independent power of reflection; I am autonomous and my relations with the other members of society tend to be, or are, on a contractual basis. I do not necessarily share the same beliefs as other members of the group and my cooperation with other members extends only to the point at which it allows me to pursue my own interests. Within this type there is a greater degree of division of labor—as seen above in Monastyrsky and Panitkov's redistribution of artistic property and also of the participants' functions and roles in KD's actions—which is consistent with the new spirit of liberalism and individualism that encourages a greater degree of competitiveness among the members of the group. It is especially in the *tusovka* type that these features began to appear more clearly.

The editor of the Moscow Art Magazine, Viktor Misiano suggests, writing on the cultural contradictions of the *tusovka*, that it became the predominant form of artistic collectivity during the nineties.⁵² The artists' *tusovka* is neither official nor unofficial; it has little in common with the bohemian artistic associations of the modernists, and only some differences with the unofficial form of collaborative collectivity of the late Soviet period. *Tusovka*, argues Misiano, "is a symptom of a society caught in the dynamics of transformation."

A distinctive characteristic trait of *tusovka* is that it brings together a number of people that are otherwise not organized in concrete structures—whether institutional or ideological—but only through the prospect of their gain. *Tusovka* considers itself pure potentiality; it is an artistic social project.⁵³

51 Arnold Hauser, *The Sociology of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 184–5.

52 Viktor Misiano, "Cultural Contradictions: On 'Tusovka'" *Art Margins* (2001) at <http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/archive/374-cultural-contradictions-on-qtusovkaq> [accessed January 12, 2009].

53 Ibid.

In Misiano's article, published initially in 1999, *tusovka* is described as a postcorporatist form of collectivity based on rudimentary market relations. Later, however, following a discussion among other critics and artists, *tusovka* would be redefined as a transitional stage between Soviet forms of artistic collectivity such as the "association" and "collaboration," and a corporate model based on profit and gain.⁵⁴

The Russian critics' announcements of a series of changes in the character of interactions within the local artistic communities find confirmation and support on the last pages of the before-*Journeys*, as well as in the volumes published during the nineties and beyond. The transition from congregations based on collective collaborations among friends to more individual and interest-based formations such as *tusovka* is symbolically represented in KD's decision to adopt as its name the bracketed [KD]—as if in order to suggest that in the post-1989 period each individual's input is calculated and added to obtain the total sum of collective actions.

FROM NUMEROLOGY TO STATISTICS

The changes that took place in the group's collective fabric also appear on the level of language. During the Soviet phases Monastyrsky very often referred to mystical and religious sources, both foreign and local, both historical and contemporary, in order to interpret and construct the aesthetic discourse of the group. Although this tendency towards esoteric and mystical interpretation persisted through the after-*Journeys*, one also observes, after 1989, the co-evolution of a tendency to apply a more rationalistic or even positivistic approach to the group's aesthetics and to the interpretation of its actions. The members of the group, Monastyrsky above all, often resort to scientifically-inspired methods in order to make inventories of those who participated in their actions, to exactly map the places where all these actions took place, to confer on all actions a serial number. Many actions organized after 1989 draw on multiple factual data collected from various mass consumer instruments (watches, GPS, video camera viewfinders), and on the pages of the after-*Journeys* one comes across indexes, tables, maps, inventories, percentages, and ratios of people, places, materials and inputs.

54 Misiano, "From Tusovka to Corporation."

The Soviet *Journeys* also contain numbers, tables and maps, but here the information is presented within a somewhat more esoteric format. Take for instance the 1987 text “The Water Margin of the Soviet Charisma (A short schizoanalysis of the history of ‘Collective Actions’),” which examines the evolution of KD’s aesthetic discourse during the seventies and eighties.⁵⁵ In order to draw his conclusions on the overall evolution of the group during its ten-year history, Monastyrsky combines ideas collected from ancient Indian and Chinese mystical and religious sources with parts of the Soviet ideological discourse. This procedure, which he calls de-ideologization or demontage, aims at establishing a certain historical continuity and at deducing distinct cycles in the evolution of the group. In this text he performs what he calls an alchemical operation, drawing on ancient Indian mythologies, the *I Ching*, numerology, and on the organization of agriculture and cattle-breeding pavilions at the Moscow VDNKh. Using the trigrams and hexagrams of the *I Ching*, as well as such data as the year of an artists’ birth, the year of the major projects of the conceptualists (MANI archive), the numerical order of KD’s actions, and the first letters in the names of the Moscow conceptualists, he divides the evolution of KD’s aesthetics into two cycles. Until 1983 KD worked under the sign of the two hexagrams 21 (*Gnawing Bite*) and 61 (*Center Confirming*); after 1983, following Alexeev’s departure, KD worked under the hexagrams 51 (*Shake*) and 15 (*Humbling*).⁵⁶ Establishing a web of relations between numbers, objects, events, and names, Monastyrsky constructs a table in which the Moscow conceptualists are arranged according to the VDNKh agricultural and animal breeding pavilions:

Fishery	Kabakov
Irrigation and Drainage	Nekrasov
Veterinary	Gorohovsky
Floriculture	Pivovarov
Forestry and Hunting	Monastyrsky, Elagina ⁵⁷

55 See A.M. “Rech’nye zavodi sovetskoi harizmy (kratkii shizoanaliz istorii ‘Kollektivnykh deistvii’)” in Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 552–61.

56 Ibid., 560.

57 For the complete table see *ibid.*, 561.

After 1989, although the mystical disposition persists, there is a tendency toward a more rationalistic conception of the group's actions and of its artistic practice in general. Parts of the after-*Journey* abound in statistical charts, indexes and maps that show the exact number of participants, how many times they attended the actions, or the exact location of each action (*Mesta KD* [Places of KD]), with an evident preference for Kievogorskoe Field. Another noticeable addition to the after-*Journeys* is the new importance attributed to numerical symbols. Numbers play an increasingly important role in the work of KD, appearing more and more often in the titles and in the plots of the post-1989 actions. While there was not a single action in the before-*Journeys* that contained numbers in its title (except for the year), many of the titles in the after-period are either numbers or include digits in their name (e.g., *Places # 40 and 41, 625-520, 625-520 in Berlin, 83, 51* [*Archeology of light-2*], 14:07-15:13).⁵⁸ For the action *Red Numbers (for Yuri Albert)* (*Krasnye chisla [Y. Albertu]*), organized in 2000 in Bochum, Germany, the artists went to a local supermarket and dictated the prices of various products on a tape recorder while walking the aisles. Later, they returned to the campus of Ruhr University, where the final part of this action took place: in front of an audience they listened to the tape, writing down the supermarket prices on a page copied from the book "Snuff Bottles from China."⁵⁹ At the end, they added up the figures using an electronic calculator, and the obtained sum of 3148.58 was printed on a separate sheet of paper and handed over to Yuri Albert, together with the proposition to include this paper as a new artwork in his next exhibition, as well as to try to sell it for 3148.58 in Marks if the exhibition was to take place in Germany, in dollars if it was in America, in pounds if in Britain, and so forth.⁶⁰ For the 2000 action *Garages* (*Garazhi*), organized for the eighth volume of the *Journeys*, the artists and their spectator-participants arrived at a remote area of Moscow where a number of garages had been built. During this action the artists and the spectators attached next to the garage's number a paper that displayed the number and the name of one of KD's actions organized during the before-period, superimposing over the garages' numerical order the historical chronology of KD's actions.

⁵⁸ See <http://conceptualism.letov.ru/KD-actions.html> [accessed February 24, 2009].

⁵⁹ Helen White, *Snuff Bottles from China* (London: Bamboo Publishing, 1992).

⁶⁰ For a description of these actions see "Red Numbers" (for Y. Albert) and "Garages" at <http://conceptualism.letov.ru/KD-actions.html> [accessed January 12, 2009].

Is the appearance of numbers, indexes, and percentages in the aesthetic discourse of [KD] a change of course, a leaning toward a more rationalistic aesthetics? Can this be interpreted as a sign of departure from those “romantic,” “spiritual,” or “metaphysical” qualities conferred on them by critics in the seventies as an essential quality that distinguished Moscow Conceptualism from its “practical” and “positivistic” Western counterpart? Had the pragmatic agenda of Perestroika and transitology begun to suffuse the “emptiness” of KD’s art and aesthetics, splitting it up in shares and percentages or filling it up with numbers, indexes and other numerical evidence? Might this new turn toward statistical reasoning suggest that the literary backbone of Moscow Conceptualism, which so far had encouraged spontaneous speculation, contemplation, reflection, vague theory, or sheer mysticism and orthodox religiosity had been permeated by a new mode of understanding that demanded factual evidence, statistics, and computable phenomena, making some parts of their after-*Journeys* look like a business inventory?

The appearance of digits, the application of percentages and ratios, brings to mind other works in which Western and non-Western conceptual and protoconceptual artists have been inspired by or have resorted to rationalistic forms of knowledge in order to address an artistic problem. Consider, for instance, Marcel Duchamp’s “art coefficient,” or the “coefficient of creativity.” Duchamp sought to determine a general “law of art,” or a principle according to which one could understand or “measure” the difference between the intention and the realization, between the idea and the materialized product, between the beginning and the end, or between the before and after of every artistic endeavor. Komar & Melamid’s series *People’s Choice* (1994–97) deploys statistics provided by polling companies in order to determine—under the motto “numbers are innocent” or “truth is a number”—various peoples’ and nations’ preferences for art.⁶¹ The artists of institutional critique have used statistics in order to expose business and financial interests behind the facades of contemporary art museums and art centers. KD’s indexation and numbers are quite different.

61 See Marcel Duchamp, *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Vitaly Komar, Alexander Melamid, and JoAnn Wypijewski, *Painting by Numbers: Komar and Melamid’s Scientific Guide to Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997). See also Komar and Melamid’s “The Most Wanted Painting on the Web” at Dia Center for Arts. <http://www.diacenter.org/km/intro.html> [accessed March 6, 2009].

In the examples above, these artists resort to the mathematically inflected language of statistics in order to address a certain problematic, which as it often happens is embodied in or represented by an institution: be it art itself for Duchamp, democracy or the choice of the majority for Komar and Melamid, or the museum of contemporary art for the artists of institutional critique. For KD, on the other hand, the application of percentages and ratios, as well as Monastyrsky's version of KD's coefficient of creativity, is an attempt to measure and to represent mathematically (that is, objectively) not an outside institution or agency but its own internal functioning. KD's coefficients deal with a specifically administrative problem: to determine the contribution and input of each member, adding up to the sum total of collective actions. In other words, the totality called KD has been put under pressure to reidentify itself by resorting to a new singularized and individualistic syntax that favors the first person pronoun "I" because it renders more clearly each member's individual responsibilities and functions. The previous totality had to be redefined and divided according to each person's individual artistic input; its common field of action or territory of operation had to be mapped and indexed according to a new understanding of what constitutes space; all the completed actions had to be enumerated, and arranged chronologically; all the spectator-participants had to be checked for attendance and listed top-down according to their degree of involvement in the works. All these operations were performed in order to reinvent and renegotiate collectivity, to make it possible to establish a new bracketed totality called [KD] that would be able to function under the new socioeconomic conditions.

It is in the index of the after-*Journeys* that KD's language becomes most like that of an institution. The calculation of numbers of attendees, events, places, and so forth is what museums and galleries of art are officially required to do for the sake of institutional accountability. While in the West progressive artists were protesting the expansion of art institutions for decades, in Eastern Europe artists were placing great hope in them. Unlike the conceptualists of the Western art world whose actions appear to be outwardly addressed to the institution of art, democracy, and the museum,

KD's self-addressed approach indicates either that such institutions were still missing in Russia or that the group was itself becoming an institution, as some Russian critics had already suggested.⁶²

The indexed parts of the post-1989 *Journeys* tend to resemble a catalog, its own catalog raisonné, which attempts to offer an exhaustive record of roles, situations, and relations, proposing its own art historical inventory.

The emergence of numbers in the titles of actions organized in the "after" period was also conditioned by the changing socioeconomic context and above all by the technological modernization of KD. Many of these titles were picked up by the artists directly from the electronic displays of the new devices and gadgets employed in the post-1989 actions. Some figures are in fact spatial and temporal measurements: geographic coordinates from GPS receivers, coordinates from topographic, satellite and Google maps, time-codes from video and photo equipment, and other devices employed by [KD] in their actions and in the process of gathering new factographical material. The new media employed in the construction of actions not only provided a more accurate mapping of location, of time and space, but also produced a new message.

But the use of this "rational" syntax in the writings of [KD], among some of the most eye-catching alterations in the language of the post-1989 *Journeys*, is also related to socioeconomic transformation; they are signs of the transition to a new economic and political system. This transition metaphorically may be described as proceeding from *words* to *numbers*, that is, from the production and reproduction of text—the main concern and preoccupation of the Politburo (see Chapter 1)—to the production and distribution of goods and services in the emerging post-Soviet consumer society. And as far as goods are concerned, they are most often expressed not as much in words as in numbers—in prices or in the barcode machine-readable representation of data. It was earlier suggested that Moscow Conceptualism originated as a result of a chronic lack of things, or rather of a shortage of things to correspond to the enormous number of words daily added by the ideological machinery.⁶³ But with the arrival of the consumerist culture the number of available things increased so

62 E. Bobrinskaia, "Kollektivnye deistvia kak institutsia."

63 On the issue of the correspondence of words with things in Russian and Soviet cultural contexts see Chapter 1 for Kabakov's explanation of the origin of Moscow Conceptualism.

dramatically that in order to manage their influx the sellers had to resort to a more abstract numerical language. In other words, under socialism there are too few things compared to the language available to describe them, whereas under capitalism there are too many.

If the emergence of Moscow Conceptualism during the 1970s came as a result of a shift that took place in the Soviet Union, a shift that transposed this group of artists from the category “underground” to that of “unofficial” (see Chapter 1), then the transition of the nineties was another, more dramatic transformation in the status of these artists, a shift that relocated them from the late Soviet category “unofficial” to that of “contemporary artist.” The latter was not necessarily an “official” position during the 1990s, and the artists who defined themselves as such inhabited a social position located somewhat at the border between unofficial and official cultures. Their activities were no longer restricted or controlled but their work remained for the most part solicited by foreign cultural institutions, for they remained for most of the 1990s at the periphery of local and/or national culture. The appearance of statistical reasoning in the after-*Journeys* is also a manifestation of this change in the social status of these artists, who were emerging gradually from their unofficialdom.

There are few branches of knowledge that have been co-opted by the modern state to the same degree as the discipline of statistics. The officialdom of this discipline is expressed by the very name, by the very root that it shares with the word “state.” The alliance between statistics—or “political arithmetic,” as it was known in its early days—and the state, dates back to the dawn of modernity,⁶⁴ when statistical reasoning began to evolve and gain in popularity concomitantly with the coming into history of the modern ideas of state and society. The modern state has traditionally co-opted mathematical reasoning as a convenient tool to address a series of problems involving the management and control of large masses: of epidemics and wars, of birth, marriage, and death. To resort to statistics is to learn to make predictions, to devise a more rational organization of one’s activities as well as to help manage one’s estate or property. What is presented statistically is what is officially permitted, and

⁶⁴ On the history of statistical reasoning and various methodologies see Alain Desrosières, *The Politics of Large Numbers: A History of Statistical Reasoning* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 23–4.

what is unofficial is often left uncounted, or the counting and measuring falls within the responsibilities of law enforcement agencies that keep their data classified. Critics of the statistical method, and of the ways in which mathematical reasoning has been adopted and integrated into modern politics, draw their criticism from the assumption that counting means isolating and containing, and that engaging in statistical reasoning presupposes objectification and manipulation, as well as that which has been made static, brought to a standstill.⁶⁵ Statistics, as the mathematical perception of reality, has traditionally been the preferred tool of economists, businessmen, politicians, and investors—of all those who seek more efficient ways to address and manage a concrete and well-established end or a material gain, as the phrase “shopkeeper’s arithmetic”⁶⁶—another early term for statistics—suggests.

The statistical insertions that began to appear in *Journeys* from 1989 on, dividing the five Soviet volumes from the post-Soviet ones,⁶⁷ are in this way suggestive of the broader social processes in which [KD] was caught. Certain authors have argued that the radical political and social transformations that began in the late 1980s and unfolded throughout the 1990s were part of another modernization leap, of another attempt to catch up with the latest developments of the Western political and economic institutions. The transition of the 1990s was sometimes described using the word *smuta* (trouble) or *smutnoe vremia* (the time of trouble)—a word that within the context of Russian history has been used to refer to the most dramatic transformations, to those radical transitional processes that led not only to regime change but also to the disintegration or to the complete reconfiguration of the country or of the empire.⁶⁸ In the twentieth century there have been two moments of *smuta*: the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 that led to the dissolution of the Russian Empire, and the Perestroika of the late 1980s that concluded in the disintegration of the USSR. Both of these

⁶⁵ David Boyle, *The Tyranny of Numbers: Why Counting Can't Make Us Happy* (London: Harper Collins, 2000), xvii.

⁶⁶ Desrosières, *The Politics of Large Numbers: A History of Statistical Reasoning*, 23–4.

⁶⁷ See pages 778–83 in Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*

⁶⁸ There are four periods of *smuta* (trouble) in Russian history: the collapse of the Kievan state (1200–1350); the situation after Ivan IV (1564–1613) called *smutnoe vremia* (The Time of Trouble); the Bolshevik revolution (1917–1921); and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

smuta have been regarded in terms of an urgent need to industrialize and modernize the country's political and economic institutions, in other words to catch up with the more efficient postindustrial Western model.

The urge for industrialization, often regarded as the main impetus of the events related to the Bolshevik revolution in the first decades of the last century, and the pressure for modernization, which prompted the liberal transition of the last two decades of the last century,⁶⁹ is also manifest in the language of those generations of artists who produced their work during these times of *smuta*. Often what the artistic programs of these artists convey has been key for understanding the process of modernization, articulated by social scientists following Max Weber in terms of rationalization, individualism, calculability, predictability, and disenchantment.

The transformations that took place in the language of the *Journeys* during the 1990s—which may be regarded as a dilution of the predominantly mystical with a more rational language—are comparable, in many regards, to the cultural processes that accompanied the rapid industrialization in the first decades of the twentieth century. The alterations that took place with Russian artistic circles before and after the October Revolution were similarly tied to their historical context. Dominant prerevolutionary artistic movements such as Russian Symbolism drew primarily on the irrational—on the metaphysical or spiritual side of experience—while after the October Revolution, when the young state made clear its intention to start a rapid process of industrialization, impulses toward a more rationalistic artistic and aesthetic agenda began to emerge within certain avant-garde circles. Constructivism, Productivism, and Engineerism put themselves in the service of the revolution, expressing their programs in a rational and pragmatic language that sharply contrasted with the mystical language deployed by the symbolists.

Along the Symbolism-Constructivism axis, KD's program, which formed well before the modernization processes of the nineties began, is more comparable to that of the former. Like the symbolists, the language of Moscow Romantic Conceptualism and of KD in particular draws on the

⁶⁹ For an interpretation of twentieth century Russian history through the prism of industrialization, modernization, and *smuta* see Vladimir Buldakov, *Quo vadis? Krizisy v Rossii: puti pereosmysleniia* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2007); Vladimir Buldakov, *Krasnaia smuta: priroda i posledstviia revoliutsionnogo nasiliia* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 1997).

unspeakable, on empty and irrational events that take place on the level of perception—an approach in so many respects inspired by the religious and metaphysical preoccupations of their immediate predecessors, as well as by the political and ideological mysticism of the Politburo. Following, however, the transitional processes of the nineties there appears a certain shift toward more rational and disenchanted trends. The alterations that took place in KD's language appear as an adjustment, as an attempt to accommodate to the new social circumstances, and instead of canceling their project (as did the members of "Champions of the World") they attempted to integrate themselves within the new conditions even if this required modifying or [bracketing] their agenda.

FROM ACTION TO INSTALLATION

A separate "Appendix" (*Prilozhenie*) in the last pages of the before-*Journeys* presents the reader with a description of several installations proposed by some of KD's members in 1989 and listed as individual works.⁷⁰ Increasingly, during the transitional nineties and into the next century, the artists produced more and more installations, but it took them over a decade to acknowledge this important transformation.

Until Volume Five of the *Journeys* it seemed as if we were traveling by train, along the rails, with planned stops (actions), and there was a certain "purposefulness" (although we lacked a definite purpose). In the end, when we reached the station "Hangars Northwest," where we ventured into the inside space of several buildings, we made a transition to exhibitions, installations, etc.⁷¹

70 Initially this section was called "Individual actions that are related to *Journeys Outside the City*," and later "Individual Works of the Group's Members." They were inserted in the middle of the first and the second volume. From the mid-eighties (the third volume) on, this section was renamed "Appendix" (*Prilozhenie*) and it was moved to the end of the volume. Since KD's early, Soviet phases some members also made individual works, which must not be confused with works (paintings, objects, installations) that some of KD's artists (N. Alexeev, I. Makarevich, E. Elagina) made and exhibited independently, outside of the group.

71 Monastyrsky, "Foreword" to the Ninth Volume. Monastyrsky, "Poezdki za gorod: 6–10 vols." [unpaginated].

This was written in 2007, and *Hangars Northwest*, to which I will return, was the title of KD's very last action in the before period. The shift to the practice of exhibition and the genre of installation to which Monastyrsky refers may be considered the most important impact of transition on KD's artistic practice and aesthetic discourse after 1989. Installations and exhibitions did not completely replace the traditional media of action and journeying for KD, but the new forms of presentation, began throughout the nineties and beyond to play a more and more important part in their work.

Monastyrsky's 1989 installation project *Journeys to the West*, found in the appendix to the Soviet *Journeys*, provide an excellent opportunity to examine the alterations that occurred in the medium, or to use a slightly outdated phrase, in "the mode of expression" of these artists. It is in this appendix that one encounters for the first time in the vocabulary of KD two new words: "installation" and "project." The new terms, which are very closely related within the syntax of contemporary art, infiltrated not only the language of these artists but also that of many other Eastern European artists and critics around the same time. The words "installation" and "project" announced a cultural shift as well as a new way of making art in the post-Soviet transitional societies.

The following is an abridged translation of Monastyrsky's installation project *Journeys to the West*:

A. MONASTYRSKY

"Journey to the West" (project)

The installation is to be located in a rectangular-shaped room the space of which must not exceed 30 square meters. Black and white photocopies of KD's 1977 action "Comedy" hang on the walls...

A rectangular desk (length – 4.5 m, width – 1.5 m, height – 85 cm) covered with a black tissue is placed in the middle of the room. On the middle of the desk, lengthwise oriented, are placed 23 books. The books are laid on book holders (22x30 cm), which were specially built for this occasion, along two rows in such a way that the covers of each row are directed towards two opposite walls. At one end of the desk, also on a book holder, lies the label of this exhibition—which reads: "KD. *Journey to the West*. Installation. A. Monastyrsky, N. Panitkov, G. Kizevalter, I. Makarevich, E. Elagina, S. Romashko, S. Hänsen. 1989"—and one of

the books (#12; see “The Position of the Objects on the Desk” [diagram], Figure 8). The TV shows a two-hour recording called “Depot,” which is accompanied by a reading from the book “Snow” (a weather forecast reference book). On the other side of the desk there is available a copy machine which the spectators of the installation are free to use.

On the desk, next to the books, there are copies from the books. The spectator is free to take some of the copies as part of the factographical discourse. However some of the copies are necessary for the [successful operation] of the installation and as the spectators take the copies away the author restores them by using the copy machine. The author makes copies only of those pages that are absolutely “necessary” for the installation (THE LIST OF COPIES ARE INDICATED ON FIGURE 8). (PAGE 239)

But the spectators may also choose to make copies from those books they like. On the top of the copy machine must be glued a text informing the spectators to put the books back on the desk.

December, 1989⁷²

The above text and diagram (FIGURE 8) is a description and graphic representation of the installation project *Journey to the West*. Monastyrsky appropriated the title of this project from that of the Chinese sixteenth-century novel by Hsi-yu Chi (among the main sources of inspiration for KD members) and the choice of this title no doubt provides some hint as to the new lifestyle of the Moscow conceptualists who were traveling extensively at the end of the eighties. They journeyed, however, not in the “out-of-town-ness” of their cities, as they did under KD’s aegis for years, but abroad, mainly to the West. Indeed, already from 1987 on many unofficial artists were preparing their exodus. In his chapter “They Came West” Solomon tells the story of many of these artists’ adventures in Berlin, Paris, and New York, describing how they appeared and were received abroad; how they collaborated with their Western colleagues; and how, led by Kabakov and Bulatov, they cleared the way for many younger artists who would make journeying to the West their new way of life for decades to come.⁷³

72 Abridged translation from Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 774.

73 Solomon, *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost*.

This was the beginning of cultural nomadism, which became popular during the nineties, and later, to a lesser degree, among Western artists. The journeys of many conceptualists abroad were not different from those of ordinary Soviet citizens, who managed to cross beyond the border of the USSR in order to lose themselves in the shiny and glamorous world of advertising and quality consumer products. Thus, this early installation project by Monastyrsky may also be regarded as a commentary on the new way of journeying practiced by the Moscow conceptualists from the second half of the eighties.

Although the word “West” in the title of the medieval Chinese work referred to India, where the main character journeyed to obtain the Buddhist sutras, the medium of installation used by Monastyrsky to present KD’s aesthetic discourse to a larger audience of anonymous spectators was brought over the Western frontiers of the USSR. In a series of dialogues that took place between Kabakov and Groys in 1994, the section dedicated to the discussion of “installation art,” or the “art of installing” (*iskusstvo intestallirovania*), is also subtitled “Dialogue about the West,” suggesting that within the Russian cultural context installation has been regarded as a Western artistic medium.⁷⁴ The main categories around which the dialogue evolves are “institution,” “installation,” and the “West,” and the conclusion that may be drawn from their exchange of opinions is that in the new Western contemporary art model the word “installation” is unthinkable without the word “institution,” and vice versa. In other words, the genre of installation art cannot be envisioned today without the support of the institution of contemporary art, nor can the institution of contemporary art be imagined without the medium of installation. Critics and artists associated with Moscow contemporary art have suggested a strong correlation between installation and institution, often to the point where the two terms are used synonymously. The Moscow artist Avdei Ter-Oganian, for instance, presents the terms “institution” and “installation” under one entry in his 1999 reference guide to Russian contemporary art.⁷⁵

The earliest installations listed on the last pages of the before-1989 *Journeys* were for the most part occasioned by the events organized by the newly opened official artists’ spaces, suggesting that the rise in popularity

⁷⁴ Kabakov et al., *Dialogi: 1990–1994*.

⁷⁵ See entry “Institution/Installation” in Miroslav Nemirov, A.S. Ter-Oganian: *zhizn’, sud’ba i kontemporari art: spravochnik-putevoditel’* (Moskva: GIF, 1999), 29.

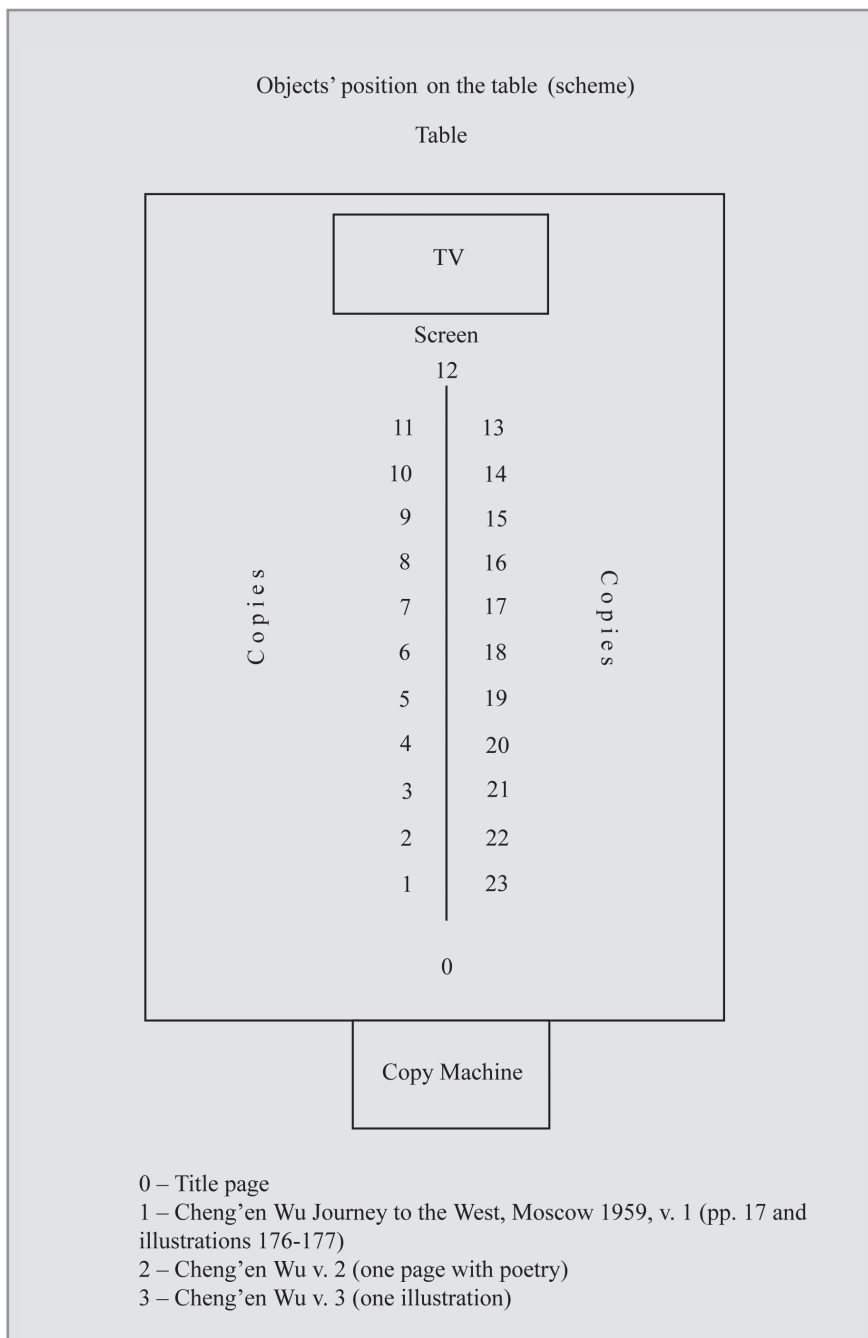


FIGURE 8: A. MONASTYRSKY, *THE POSITION OF THE OBJECTS ON THE DESK FOR THE INSTALLATION "JOURNEY TO THE WEST,"* DIAGRAM, 1989 [RECONSTRUCTED]

of installation art in Moscow went hand in hand with the democratization of the local cultural institutions and the emergence of the earliest Western-styled galleries and centers for contemporary art.⁷⁶ But there are also paradoxes. Both the text and the diagram of the *Journeys to the West* installation differ from the descriptions and the diagrams made for the earlier actions of the *Journeys* in several respects. If one compares the diagram of this work (FIGURE 8) to diagrams made for the previous actions of KD (FIGURES 5, 6, AND 7 IN CHAPTER 1) it may be observed that Figure 8 shows neither artists nor spectators but only objects and equipment. There are no arrows showing the movement of the spectators on the field, no dots to indicate where the artist will appear, and no circles to mark the place from where the photographers will document the action. The missing human subject in the diagram of the *Journeys to the West* suggests that the project takes place in the gallery space where the work will interact with potential anonymous-spectators, a category of KD's discourse that was traditionally excluded from serious engagement in the group's aesthetic investigations. Instead, Monastyrsky provides within the white box of the sterile gallery space the necessary settings for anonymous-spectators to familiarize themselves with the process and procedures of investigating the nature of art; they may serve themselves with copies from various books on display; they may even watch TV; but they are not asked to write reports, share their responses and reactions, or to participate in one form or another as were KD's spectator-participants. (Paradoxical as it may seem—and in spite of widely proclaimed processes of political democratization—within [KD]'s circle, and in the interaction between the group and its spectators, relations appear somewhat less democratic, or only formally so). Most early diagrams of KD's actions showed the presence and the position of the acting human subject in between objects and places, but even in those diagrams that are unpopulated, they still impose on the surrounding space KD's own concepts, categories, zones, and fields (e.g., the demonstrative field, the expository field, the zone of imperceptibility) redefining and recontextualizing that universe according to the artists' own understanding

76 The Appendix (*Prilozhenie*) of the Soviet *Journeys* contains several other installation projects: "Three Installations" by Monastyrsky and Hänsen, which exhibited the archive MANI, and the installation "Research Documentation" assembled by E. Elagina, I. Backstein, G. Kizevalter, and N. Panitkov in 1989 for the Exhibition hall of Krasnogvardeiskij district ("Kashirka"). Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 72–3.

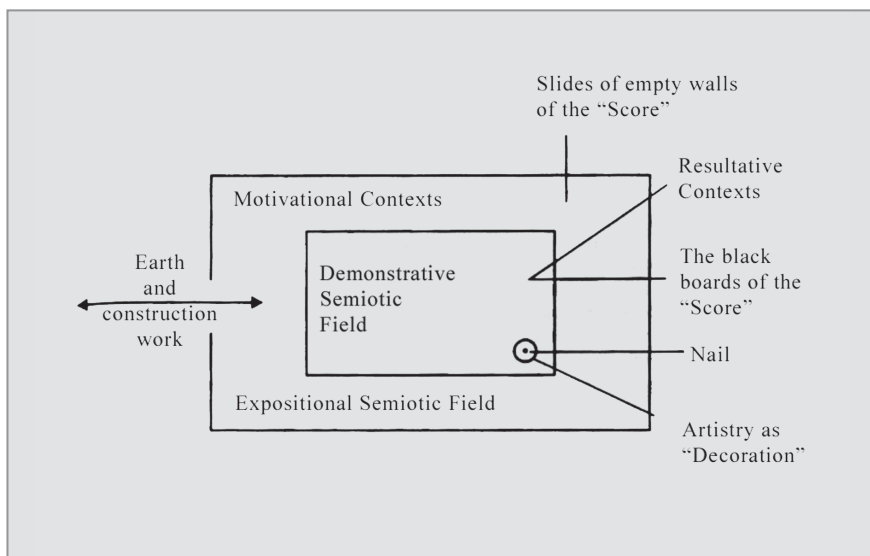


FIGURE 9: A. MONASTYRSKY, *EARTH WORKS*, DIAGRAM, 1987 (RECONSTRUCTED)

of the nature of art and of space (FIGURES 9 AND 10). In the diagram for the installation *Journeys to the West* it is the gallery space that imposes its own fields and effects of power on the artwork through the “dictatorship” of architecture.

As Thomas McEvelley has observed of the white cube of the gallery space: “The highly controlled context of the modernist gallery does to the art object what it does to the viewing subject... [T]he context devours the object, becoming it.”⁷⁷ The two types of drawings may be compared to diagrams of sentences: while the drawings from the before-period (FIGURES 5, 6, 7, AND 9) represent both nouns and verbs (objects, persons and their actions), the 1989 drawing (FIGURE 8) diagrams only nouns (objects). While the former diagram was drawn in order to motivate the artists and the spectators to move and act, the latter diagram was made in order to settle down, arrange, and even arrest any movement. The verbs had begun to calcify and turn into nouns. Charles Peirce suggests that all nouns

⁷⁷ Thomas McEvelley, introduction to Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, expanded ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 7.

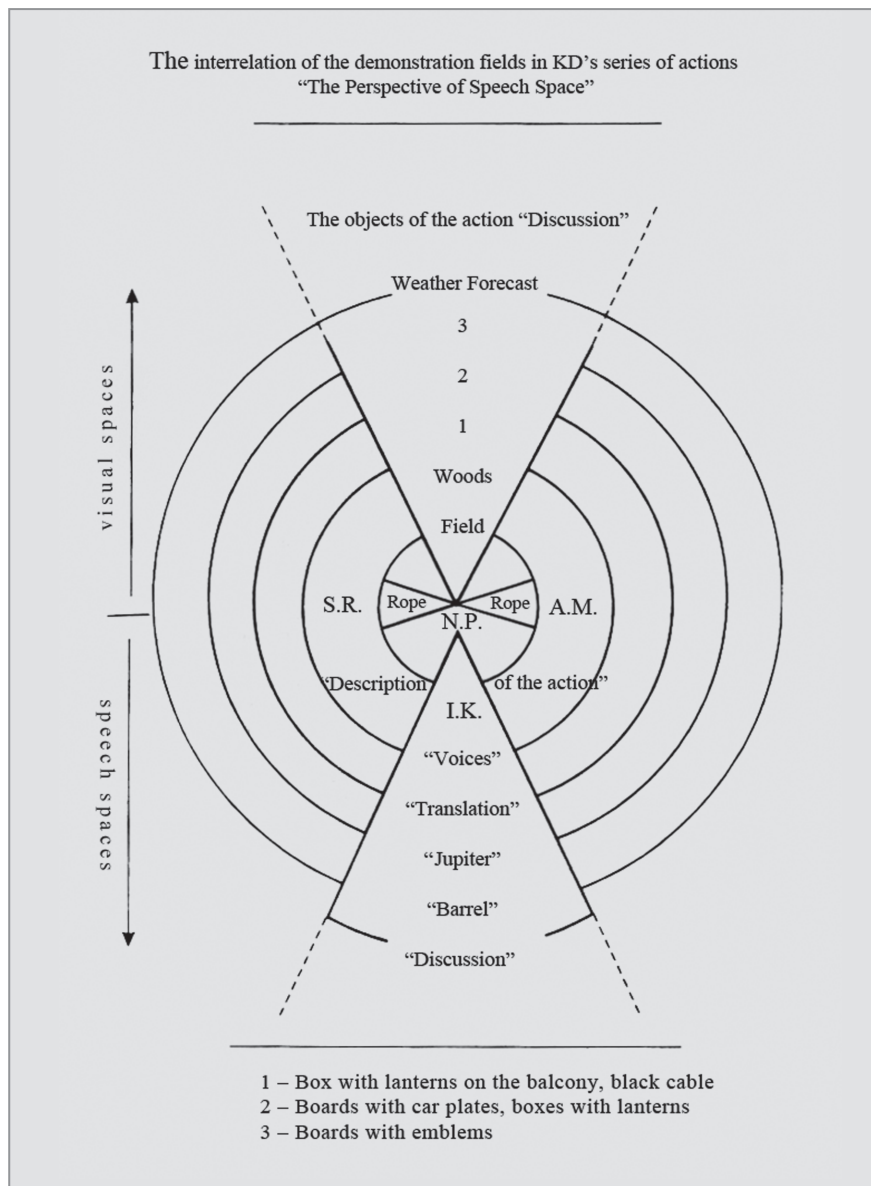


FIGURE 10: A. MONASTYRSKY, THE INTERRELATION OF THE DEMONSTRATIVE FIELDS IN KD'S SERIES OF ACTIONS "THE PERSPECTIVE OF SPEECH ACT," DIAGRAM, 1985 [RECONSTRUCTED]

are reified verbs;⁷⁸ KD's transition offers a good illustration of how this reification takes place in the arts under the influence of new socioeconomic conditions, in which the institution of architecture, and institutional architecture, arrests KD's "actions," turning them into "installations." The strict and often authoritarian demands that architecture made on art, during its long history, often resulted in dramatic changes, introducing for instance new art genres and even styles; for example, in the evolution and then the divergence of genre painting from church murals in the West, or sculpture from religious icons in the East. Art historians have suggested that an innovative art dealer such as Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, who introduced new marketing techniques in art (the small gallery versus the spacious salons), also willingly or unwillingly contributed to the revolutionary aesthetic innovations made by the early "gallery cubists" (Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque); Kahnweiler helped to create the necessary conditions for the emergence of collage and also affected the works of these artists in terms of the scale of and the choice over the material and subject matter.⁷⁹ Similarly, with the re-emergence of art as an autonomous realm in postsocialist countries, and under a new social pressure to share the artwork with the anonymous public, or to sell it to the new art merchants, architecture steps in as the intermediary, or the middleman that helps negotiate both the meaning and the price but also leaves traces of these processes of negotiation in the artwork's content and form. These recent and rapid changes in mode of artistic display and presentation reveal some of the economic conditions that lie behind the emergence of the post-World War II artistic genre of installation art.

If the liberalization of Moscow in the 1990s manifested itself economically in the emergence of private cooperatives and politically in the first free election of people's deputies, in the visual arts one of the first signs of the liberalization of art was the complete rehabilitation in Russia of such artistic genres as performance, happening, and installation; genres that had been criminalized to buttress the authority of Socialist

78 Umberto Eco quotes Charles Sanders Peirce in *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 187.

79 On the relation between the new marketing strategies of Kahnweiler and the work of the gallery cubists see David Cottington, *Cubism and its Histories* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2004); David Cottington, *Cubism in the Shadow of War: The Avant-Garde and Politics in Paris 1905–1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

Realism. The three-dimensional art (apart from socialist sculpture and the decorative arts) that strove to spread out and unfold within the socialist time-space continuum had long been treated with iconoclastic suspicion and disapproval. It was, however, more difficult for the authorities to control time-dependent than space-dependent unofficial arts. It was complicated to restrict performances and happenings, for the artists either performed in their apartments, or like KD they journeyed outside the city and acted in the no-man's-land of the Soviet "out-of-town-ness." With installation it was different. One reason why this medium did not emerge earlier or become a popular unofficial art form lies in its dependence on space, a dimension much easier to commodify and control than time. In the USSR, with its imperial rapacity for territory, the state was the only proprietor of space, and it is for this reason that the medium of installation could not have flourished before 1989. Within the circle of Moscow conceptualists the duo Komar and Melamid, who have claimed to be the first artists in the USSR to have made installations in the seventies, made site-specific works in their apartments before they left for the West. But installation cannot be made in one's apartment; the very history of this medium is related to that of the democratization of artistic production and display, which I shortly discuss below, and requires an open and public space. Kabakov, who is today the best-known Russian installation artist, and who also elaborated an entire theory of "total installation," made installation his main and most consistent medium only after he moved to the West, in the second half of the eighties (1986).

For Monastyrsky, who remained in Moscow to make public the aesthetic program of KD, *Journeys to the West* was also among the first installation projects. A decade later he recounted how the transition to the new medium had taken place:

I have every reason to believe that during the 1990s my aesthetic discourse unfolded not as much in the actions of the Seventh volume of the *Journeys* as in installations... The installations naturally continued the fifth volume, which ended with the action "Hangars Northwest." In principle this was not an action but a sort of indication of the new locus of activity. The hangars located in the northwest part of Kievogorskoe Field, beyond its boundaries [see map of Kievogorskoe Field below Figure 12] are closed spaces that served us as a model, or as the eidos for the new space, in which we (or at least I) began to build, beginning

in the 1990s, installations. This is to say that the open space of Kievogorskoe Field was replaced by the closed space of the galleries and museums.⁸⁰

The last action of the fifth volume, entitled *Hangars Northwest*, revolved around the artists' discovery, in the northwest part of Kievogorskoe Field, of several hangars. The buildings, storage facilities of the Williams Institute of Fodder in Moscow, were located beyond the limits of Kievogorskoe Field, in the woods, and Monastyrsky maintains that they emerged there suddenly and unexpectedly. "Earlier in the seventies and the eighties we saw some wooden construction going on and we heard dogs barking in that part of the field, which made us think that it was a little village."⁸¹ When in November 1989 they finally decided to check out that part of the field, they discovered the hangars. Later Monastyrsky explained the appearance of these hangars on Kievogorskoe Field as a sign of change, taking these structures as an augur of the impending radical transformations in KD's aesthetic discourse; their art was about to move from the open into the closed space of museums and galleries. This interpretation is typical of KD and of Monastyrsky, who has always been reluctant to admit, or take into account, social and economic forces that may have left considerable imprints on their artistic practice and aesthetic discourse, and who prefer to resort to fortunetelling and pseudo-occult explanations. This political myopia, which was shared by many from the unofficial dissident circles, would be later criticized by the next generation of Russian artists as one of the former's great disadvantages.⁸²

This partial transformation of action into installation is important in several respects. It suggests first of all a transition from a problematic of time to that of space, and as such it provides additional insight into the main socioeconomic transformations of post-Soviet society. It may be understood as a transition from socialist politics, which was primarily concerned (even if distortedly) with time, or with history as a major category of Marxist tradition, to a capitalist politics or rather economics, which

80 Monastyrsky, "Installations" in Volume Seven "Individual actions that are related to the *Journeys Outside the City*" Monastyrsky, "Poezdki za gorod: 6–10 vols." [unpaginated].

81 Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 672.

82 For criticism of dissident collective actions see the writings of the Marxist working group "Chto Delat'? What is to be Done?" at <http://www.chtodelat.org>.

has been more concerned with the effective and profitable management of space. The communist bureaucrats were primarily concerned with “before” and “after,” with past and future (for example the past of the October Revolution or the future of Communism) whereas the newly bred capitalist entrepreneurs began their business activities by dealing overtly and pragmatically with the efficient management of the present tense.

KD's shift from actions to installations in the late eighties and early nineties takes place in a manner similar to the evolution of this artistic medium in other cultural contexts. In the West and more specifically in the United States, the medium of installation arose as a result of complex multilayered artistic processes that had evolved over the previous fifty years. Both artists and art historians give the credit to Jackson Pollock's action paintings, which as William DeKooning famously stated “broke the ice” for an entire spectrum of new forms of artistic manifestations and media in post-1945 art. A simplified schema indicates that installation art evolved, during the second half of the last century, from the late-1950s “environments” of Allan Kaprow, who had acknowledged the legacy of Pollock's action;⁸³ from the minimalist “situations” of the 1960s; from the “project art” or “temporary art” in the 1970s to the official media of “installation art” in the second half of the 1980s.⁸⁴ Although the term “installation art” was known and used by artists from the late 1960s and 1970s, it was only in the late 1980s and particularly in the early 1990s that it took on a stronger and more stable meaning and was finally accepted as an independent category by the major art historical reference sources.⁸⁵ It was also around this time that Western art historians and critics began gradually to incorporate this new form of artistic expression into their

83 Alan Kaprow wrote “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” in 1956, acknowledging the role of “action painting” in the creation of first assemblages and environments. Julie H. Reiss, *From Margin to Center: the Spaces of Installation Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 8.

84 Ibid., p. xi. See also Erika Suderburg, *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

85 Reiss quotes *The Art Index*, which until 1993 referred the researcher of “installation” to see “Environment [Art].” Only from Volume 42 (November 1993) was installation art indexed by this publication as an independent category. Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art*, xii. On this topic see also Kristine Stiles, “I/Eye/Oculus: Performance, Installation and Video,” in *Themes in Contemporary Art*, ed. Gillian Perry and Paul Wood (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 183–4.

academic disciplines, taking up this task from the artists, who had until then done all the theoretical and critical work themselves.⁸⁶

As I have said, KD's conversion followed the trajectory of the evolution of Western contemporary art in the second half of the last century, which in a rather simplified metaphor may be imagined as the gradual transformation of Pollock's arena for action (the canvas stretched out on the floor) into an institutional venue, a gallery space offered to artists for installing, showing to the public and then uninstalling the end results of their artistic actions. Like many other Moscow unofficial artists, KD switches to a model that, on the one hand, may be regarded as more democratic, for it offers an opportunity to show the work to a larger audience, but on the other hand, appears as an effort, or rather an invitation, to restrict, localize, and confine their artistic movement to an environment that functions according to a pre-established set of rules and regulations enacted by a certain territorial logic of capitalism. Moreover, KD's transformation takes place at the same time that installation art was finally accepted and integrated within the Western art world. Its recognition as an accepted and legitimate form of contemporary artistic expression in the West took place concomitantly with the promotion of this new medium by the institutions of transition, above all by the Soros Centers for Contemporary Art, whose first annual exhibitions consisted almost exclusively of installation art. When in the early nineties traditional structures and institutions in charge of supporting the arts, such as the Ministries of Culture and the Unions of Artists, went bankrupt, it was the foreign foundations and, above all, the Soros Centers for Contemporary Art that performed the main tasks of liberalization and modernization of culture using installation as their preferred tool.

In the West installation art evolved gradually, over decades of artists' struggling to launch alternative venues for the production and display of art, as well as to generate unconventional cultural forms and means of expression that they thought, perhaps naively, could exist outside the reach of the market and of the culture industry. In Eastern Europe, especially in more liberal socialist countries such as Hungary, Poland, and Yugoslavia, artists inspired by their Western colleagues also established unofficial alternative venues and made happenings, environments, and other

86 Stiles, "I/Eye/Oculus: Performance, Installation and Video," 183.

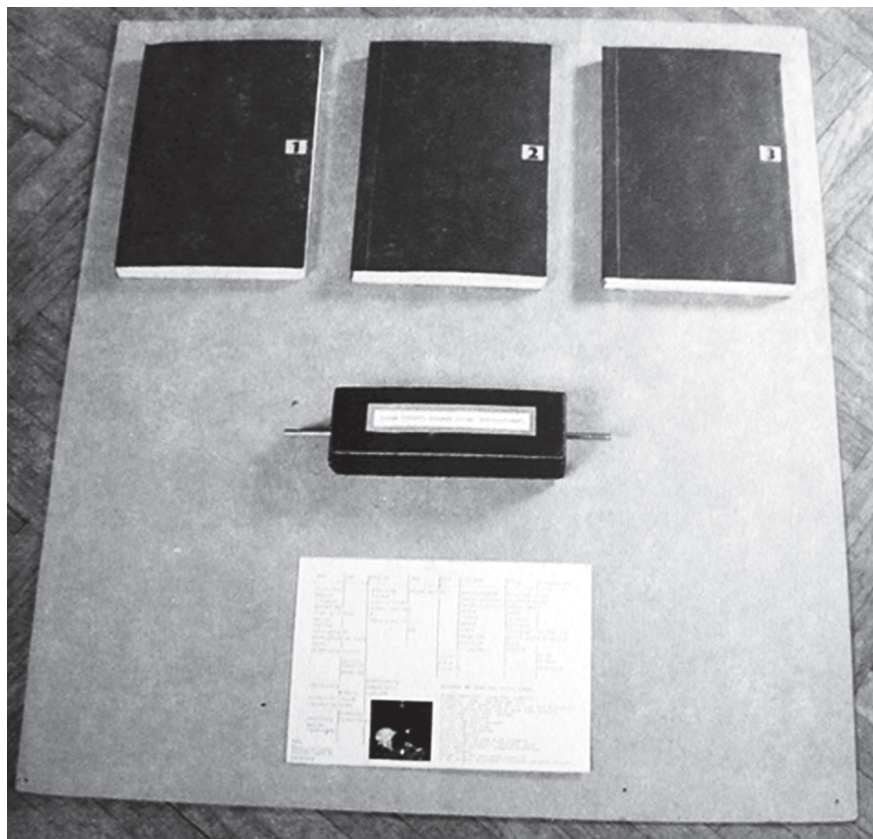


FIGURE 11: A. MONASTYRSKY, *SHOW-WINDOW*, INSTALLATION WITH THE THIRD VOLUME OF "JOURNEYS OUTSIDE THE CITY," INSTALLATION, 1990

nonconventional site-specific work in order to distance themselves from the ideologized socialist mainland. Until the second half of the eighties these two histories evolved in parallel (officially on one side of the Iron Curtain and unofficially on the other), as if in order to be drawn together within the firm grip of the victorious capitalism of the nineties. Since in the West the emergence of installation was an open process, it did not appear as unusual and foreign as it did in Eastern Europe, where the new form of art emerged suddenly, provoking a certain unease among the public at large as well as among many artists. In Estonia, for example, in the early nineties, local artists spoke of the "war of installation against painting,"⁸⁷

87 Kreg A. Kristring in Rosenfeld and Dodge, *Art of the Baltics: The Struggle for Freedom of Artistic Expression under the Soviets, 1945–1991*, 129.

evoking the privileged position that this new and heavily subsidized medium received at the expense of other, more traditional genres of the fine arts. Not only did installation art become the most favored medium of the new contemporary art model that settled in Eastern Europe during the nineties, but it also was from the very beginning associated with the institutions to such a degree that today (two decades later) one still cannot imagine an installation outside of the confines of an art institution, or without its financial and logistical support. Installation art shares the fate of other new media like performance art, which today “remains more frequently encountered in documentary photography, film, and video than in live events.”⁸⁸ This is indeed ironic because these forms of artistic expression emerged in an attempt to liberate themselves from various extra-artistic constraints and to establish more democratic and open forms of culture.

FROM DESCRIPTIONS TO PROJECTS

The concept “project” entered the language of KD and of other Moscow conceptualists around the same time as “installation.” Of course, this new addition to the vocabulary was not unique to the Muscovites, but appeared as a lexicographic novelty in the vocabularies of many other artists and critics in the postsocialist bloc. The new words came to anticipate some of the radical changes about to take place in both the means and modes of artistic production, display, and distribution. Unlike “installation,” the word “project” (*proyekt*) was not unknown among the Soviet masses, as many of them were employed in the so-called “project institutes” (*proyektnye instituty*) gathering statistical data or mass engineering products for the centrally planned state economy. However, within the field of both official and unofficial art and culture—with the exception of architecture—the word “project” was not widely used.

“Project” comes to substitute, in part, for another word used during the socialist period. In Soviet times, for an artist to receive benefits from the state, he or she was expected to become a member of the Union of Artists and then to pledge allegiance to its statutes and to the socialist “Plan.” Of course not only official but also unofficial artists—following the earlier discussed artist-character schism—had to go along with the

88 Stiles, “I/Eye/Oculus: Performance, Installation and Video,” 183.

rules set by these mass organizations in order to make a living or to qualify for free studios and apartments. The five-year plan was directed toward coordinating large-scale efforts and material resources to attain higher productivity and standards of socialist living. Like the representatives of other professions, artists were not absolved from participating in these formal procedures, a ritual that in the last decades of state socialism became the object of ridicule and contempt, especially within unofficial circles. After 1989, with the emergence of the first privately funded art institutions, artists began to learn about new ways of interacting with art institutions and of formulating artistic intentionality. The project became, first and foremost, a prerequisite for an artist to benefit from resources offered by the Western cultural donors that operated within the postsocialist region. Now, the procedure was not a formal ritual performed collectively as when pledging allegiance to the five-year socialist plan, but a rigorous individual negotiation that drew upon strictly personal, artistic, social, and economic achievements.⁸⁹

Within a broader context, the emergence of the word “project” in the vocabularies of postsocialist artists cannot be regarded in isolation from the growing role of the new art institutions; of those contemporary art centers whose staff and guests began to introduce, above all, the young Eastern European artists to the formulas of Western art management, teaching them how to write up projects for grants, how to compile presentable portfolios in order to access sources of private or public funding. For many artists, developing and writing up projects became not only an indispensable skill for survival under the new conditions of market-driven cultural administration but almost a form of artistic expression and art-making on its own. The term “project” thus certainly had a wide effect on the visual arts. After 1989 many Eastern European artists suddenly ceased referring to their practice in terms of making a painting, a sculpture, a drawing, or a video, stating instead, “I am working on a project” or “I have a project.”

As already noted above, in the early days of KD the group’s members had referred to their works using such terms as “action,” “journey,” “work,” “thing,” or “setting.” When the work was still in progress or when they had to announce their intentions, KD employed a more specific

89 For a more detailed comparison between the socialist “Plan” and the capitalist “Project” in the context of the Soros Centers for Contemporary Art Network, see Eşanu, “What Was Contemporary Art.”

terminology, invoking an old term from their *Dictionary*, “program of works” (*programma rabot*), or resorting to more specific words and phrases, such as “descriptions” (*opisania*), “descriptive text” (*opisatel’nyi text*), and “eventful part” (*sobytiiaia chast’*). The same appendix to the Soviet *Journeys* that announced the distribution of collective artistic property among independent shareholders and the first installation proposals also introduces the word “project.” As the post-1989 context solicited these artists to put their work on display, to show it to a larger and more anonymous public in the preferred new format of exhibitions or installations, their language also had to adjust to these changes. As if in order to accommodate to these new conditions, [KD]’s language had to adopt certain new, foreign words, often creating the impression that the group’s unique hermetic language had undergone another “depressurization,”⁹⁰ this time accommodating a more rationalistic, economical, and technical syntax. What were once vaguely called “descriptions” or “eventful parts” of “actions” now tended also to be called “projects” for “installations.”

The editor of the *Dictionary* credits the poet Dmitry Prigov with first noticing the new word and committing it to [KD]’s post-1989 terminology.⁹¹ Prigov, drawing attention to its growing popularity, felt that the new term emphasized above all the development of the (art)work along a temporal axis; that the word laid stress on the temporal dimension in the unfolding of the artistic process.⁹² As it is often the case with many terms in the conceptualist *Dictionary*, the word is not thoroughly discussed, and we do not know how this newly discovered temporal dimension becomes concretely manifest within the structure of the postsocialist conceptual artwork, poem, or action. Therefore I will construct my interpretation drawing mainly upon changes largely external to this tradition, those manifest within a larger social or cultural context. In relation to the previous section of this chapter it appears that while “installation” was the concrete accommodation of KD’s actions to *spatial* presentation (arresting and arranging them within the perimeter of the newly opened independent spaces), “project,” on the other hand, was generally the presentation of certain actions-turned-installations within the *temporal* dimension. The project sets clear temporal limits to artists’ work. It appears as a certificate

90 See Chapter 3.

91 Monastyrsky, *Slovar’ terminov moskovskoi kontseptual’noi shkoly*, 193.

92 See entry “project” in the Appendix.

and identification document (ID) whose role in the new conditions of cultural management is to attest to the very existence of the action/installation and to its temporal positioning.

In the case of KD, the word appears for the first time in brackets at the end of Monastyrsky's 1989 installation proposal *Journeys to the West*, printed in the appendix to the published *Journeys*.⁹³ The text of this project-proposal strongly contrasts with his earlier descriptions of KD's actions. Although Monastyrsky's syntax does not change radically, the project for the "Journeys to the West" installation (see description above) reads differently, and this is the result of the new format in which the writing is presented. The project is less specific with regard to the directions of the artists' and spectator-participants' movements on the field of action, and instead it is more detailed and determined as to the behavior of the anonymous-spectator, to the position that the objects must occupy within a given context as well as with regard to the necessary equipment, space, and materials, along with their dimensions and sizes and the manner of their application or usage. Most importantly, whereas the previous descriptions of actions often suggested that the described situation or event had already taken place, or that it would unfold (maybe) according to this or that scenario, the more precise language of the project, in contrast, indicates that the work was not yet completed at the time of the writing and that its completion or incompletion depended in many respects on whether the proposed idea and the list of necessary materials (or budget) would be accepted by the authority to whom the project was addressed. Unlike the description, the project for an installation was an intention, a projection, and a request for authorization to act.

In its earliest stages, when KD was not yet perceived as a collective, and when some of its members at the time gathered in order to organize a "staging" or a "production," their favored mode of formulating authors' intentionality was called "Program of Works" (*Programma rabot*). The term was introduced by the poet Lev Rubenstein, an early member who later withdrew from the main core of the group. In the *Dictionary* the editor specifies that what was in 1975 called "Program of Works" was replaced in the nineties by the term "project." The "Program of Works" was to be understood as a plan for the "Author" (another term in the *Dictionary*), and the word "program" was introduced deliberately in order to erase any "poetic" or "artistic" pathos, any trace of personality from the so-

93 Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 774.

called “creative process.”⁹⁴ But “Program of Works” was also an internal concept, like many others in the vocabulary, that helped the artists organize and advance their work. The term “project,” on the other hand, was not these artists’ invention; it was picked up or even imposed from outside by changing sociopolitical and, above all, economic conditions.

Kabakov has been, once again, the most eloquent and clear voice on the importance of the term “project.” In the early nineties he drew attention to its significance for his own artistic career and life in the West. He uses this concept to reflect once again upon the differences between the West and the East (Russia):

In the West there is a special relation and importance that is attributed to the notions of “project” and “success.” These two words represent for me a very clear criterion for distinguishing the mode of existence in the East (specifically in Russia) and in the West (in Europe and America.) While observing many successful and unsuccessful people in the West I’ve noticed that the former rely very much on what is called “project.” The only ones who are successful are those who have a project, who have a strategy on how to reach success. We can even say that the normal functioning of the Western individual is to have a project and to bring it to success.⁹⁵

In the East, and particularly in Russia, having a personal project (a plan, a strategy, or a program), says Kabakov, is often regarded with suspicion of malicious or even devilish intent (*diavoliskoe namerenie*). The reason for the disbelief in projects has to do with a resistance to change and reform, for “the history of Russia is a history of failed projects... (this is the country of unrealized projects, like that of the Russian avant-garde).”⁹⁶ The term “project” is also relevant for Kabakov because it is directly related to installation, which would become his main medium from the second half of the eighties. He stresses that in the West the aim of the project is to make its intent, means, goals, aims, and results as clear as possible.

[In the West] every incomprehensibility in a project is punished in the most severe manner... I could provide examples from my own practice:

94 Please see the term “Program of Works” in the Appendix.

95 Kabakov et al., *Dialogi: 1990–1994*, 152.

96 Ibid., 152–54.

unlike the production of paintings, the first phase of an installation consists in proposing it to the institution where it will be built. From my experience I could say that this project must present a product that is absolutely clear for comprehension... The condition that must be respected is that the machine [installation] will not be doubted by anybody, and you must be ready to answer to any question that your project may provoke.⁹⁷

Kabakov also resorts to the notion of project in order to draw attention to a certain difference between the artists of the nineties and what he calls the "artists of the past," or the precontemporary Moscow artists of the previous decades.

The projects that contemporary artists are proposing today radically differ from the indefinite projects of the artists of the past. To the question: "What do you want to paint or to make?" the artist of the past could have calmly answered "I will start and then—I will see," "And when are you going to finish?"—"Well, this is such a process. . . ." Today every sign of ambiguity in your project announces your defeat.⁹⁸

Of course, we may note in passing that what Kabakov above calls "indefinite projects . . . of the past" are not the same as the "contemporary projects" artists would learn about after 1989. As noted above, artists in Moscow did not use this word in the Soviet period. Kabakov himself began to reflect upon the meaning of this new word after he had lived for several years in the West, where he developed his own art of installation. During the nineties, throughout his writings, he returns upon many occasions to reflect upon the new project method, seeing it as something profoundly Western, capitalistic, and American, and stating that he had begun to see the West as an immense "ocean of projects."⁹⁹

97 Ibid., 157.

98 Ibid.

99 "It may be said that the entire West consists of an ocean of little projects. And despite the fact that these projects intersect and may theoretically even collide . . . they are conceived in such a way that the projects do not interfere with and even help each other. I never heard of someone who was prevented from accomplishing his project. Moreover, when projects intersect they form gratings, structures, and constructions that help elevate and parallel one project against others. In America, 'the country of victorious capitalism,' this becomes especially obvious. When somebody brings in a new project he is instantly surrounded by others who wish to join it." Ibid., 153.

How might one further interpret the arrival of this new word? And does this word indeed point to a Western, or more specifically to an American trace left by the transitional processes that were taking place in Russia? What intellectual tradition has relied on this concept to articulate its doxa and to popularize its values?

In Russia the history of the word “project” goes hand in hand with its own project of Westernization. The Russian word *proyekt*, derived from the German *Projekt*, was introduced by Peter the Great in the early eighteenth century along with the first pro-Western reforms,¹⁰⁰ which were regarded with suspicion and distaste by a large part of the population. For instance, a dictionary entry such as *proektör* (projector), which adjoins the word “project” in the Russian etymological dictionaries, ironically denotes someone who is very enthusiastic about drawing up unrealizable and unfounded plans,¹⁰¹ a meaning to which Kabakov also refers in his example of the historical Russian avant-garde.

The Latin etymology of the term “project” indicates something “thrown forth or before,” while in English the word has taken on the meaning of “a proposed undertaking,” “an individual or collaborative enterprise that is carefully planned and designed to achieve a particular aim,” along with such synonyms as “program,” “venture,” “scheme,” “idea,” “purpose,” or “objective.”¹⁰² These additional meanings are inscribed within such phrases as “project manager,” “project assistant,” “project planning,” and “project resources” that entered the Russian language during the nineties and that many believed to be another wave of the political, economic, and cultural Westernization of Russia.

The historian Alexandr Kamenski has suggested that in Russian political vocabulary the word “project” is for the most part accompanied by the word “liberal,” as in the phrase “the liberal project.” “I would like to draw your attention to the fact that ‘project’ is being used exclusively with the word ‘liberal,’ and that nobody speaks today about a communist,

100 Max Vasmer, O. N. Trubachev, and B. A. Larin, *Etimologicheskii slovar' russkogo iazyka*, Izd. 2., 4 vols. (Moscow: Progress, 1987). v. III, 373.

101 I. A. Vasiukova and I. K. Sazonova, *Slovar' inostrannykh slov: s grammaticheskimi formami, sinonimami, primerami upotrebleniia* (Moscow: “Ast-Press,” 1998), 497.

102 See the entry “project” in *The Oxford English Dictionary* 2nd ed. 1989, OED Online. Oxford University Press. <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50189690> [accessed November 8, 2008].

a fascist, or any other kind of project; if something is called liberal—then inevitably the word ‘project’ is also added.”¹⁰³ Today Russian online chat rooms and blogs are abuzz with discussions and criticism of this new word, which some regard as a contamination of the Russian language by a parasite that attaches itself to all sorts of activities. One blogger writes: I began to be irritated by the word “project.” B. Akunin is not a writer but a “project.” Charity Project, Russian Project, Eastern project... Soon they will start calling children “projects.”¹⁰⁴

Most of the complaints about this word carry a whiff of nationalistic sentiment. In Russia the word “project” was not only suspected of an opportunistic orientation toward success (or success at any cost) but it was also considered by some to represent a rationalistic, materialistic, work-oriented instrumentalism, the soulless cult of the fact and the cold pragmatism of the West, which had attempted to contain and control the untamable creativity and unpredictability of the “Russian soul” (*Russkaia dusha*).

There are several intellectual traditions through which one can examine the meanings invested in the term “project.”¹⁰⁵ Sartre, for example, employs this concept in order to express the relation of the subject to the world, his or her mode of being-in-the-world. The “Key to Special Terminology” section in the appendix of Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* defines the project in the following way:

Project. Both verb and noun. It refers to the For-itself’s choice of its way of being and is expressed by action in the light of a future end.¹⁰⁶

According to this tradition a project is a set of actions, deeds, behaviors, possibilities, and choices that a person makes throughout his or her life. Each individual’s life is composed of a multitude of projects—all of which are bound together within a totality that Sartre calls the “original”

103 Alexandr Kamenskii, “Reformy v Rossii s tochki zrenia istorika (lektsia),” polit.ru, <http://www.polit.ru/lectures/2005/11/17/kamensk.html> [accessed November 22, 2008].

104 Entry from the Russian LiveJournal blog by avla 2008-01-29 (15:51:00) <http://avla.livejournal.com/51193.html> [accessed November 22, 2008].

105 For a more detailed theoretical interpretation of the term “project” see Eşanu, “What Was Contemporary Art.”

106 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1966), 776.

or the “fundamental project.” The latter is what limits one’s self-identity, what makes one act or choose in one way and not the other; it is what the person is, or what the person makes of him or herself through living. The disclosure of a person’s “fundamental project” is the main task of existential psychoanalysis, and one can see the method at work in Sartre’s autobiographical writings.¹⁰⁷

Although Sartre’s use of “project” may help clarify some aspects of the term, especially the relation between an action and its end, or the temporal dimension detected by the poet Prigov, within the present context of the word’s emergence in the *Dictionary of Moscow Conceptualism* it may be more efficient to turn one’s attention to another intellectual tradition that was important within the intellectual and political climate of the last decades of the Soviet Union. Scholars of Soviet and Russian culture have hinted at the fact that certain words that surfaced during the early phases of Perestroika were also central operating concepts for some distinguished pragmatist-thinkers.¹⁰⁸ The reception of both theoretical and applied pragmatism in Russia and in the Soviet Union over the last century was, however, problematic. At the turn of the twentieth century pragmatic ideas were received and widely discussed by Russian philosophers, and interest in the writings of the American pragmatists continued after the October revolution, especially during the socialist-capitalist compromise of the New Economic Policy (NEP) of the twenties. With the advance of Stalinism in the thirties the situation radically changed, and thinkers like William James were called “puppets of American capitalism,” and James himself was lampooned as the “Wall Street Pragmatist.”¹⁰⁹ In spite of the fact that some Marxist intellectuals saw affinities between Marx’s vision of *praxis* and the close cohabitation of theory and practice in pragmatism, Lenin, and those after him in charge of Marxism-Leninism, were dismissive and hostile of this tradition. Only with the advent of Perestroika was pragmatism rehabilitated; as some critics have pointed out, Gorbachev began his reforms under the banner of “pluralism” (a central Jamesian concept),

107 I am thankful to Fredric Jameson for pointing out to me the importance of the term “project” in Sartre.

108 See for instance the reference to Mikhail Epstein’s criticism of the word “pluralism” in Joan Delaney Grossman and Ruth Rischin, *William James in Russian Culture* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003), 213.

109 Grossman and Rischin, *William James in Russian culture*, 2.

which along with “democracy,” “parliament,” and “privatization” formed a chain of key pragmatist concepts during the last years of Soviet rule.¹¹⁰

Practical pragmatism, where the term “project” is more frequently encountered, shared the same fate as pragmatic theories. In the early twentieth century several Russian educators were very enthusiastic about implementing in their nation’s schools a new educational model called the “project method.” The method, which originated in American agricultural schools during in the second half of the nineteenth century, was later developed and perfected by John Dewey, who was the most active advocate of this new method of education, and who insisted on its direct relation to democracy.¹¹¹ Dewey argued that the project method would be more effective in instructing and preparing children to live in a democratic society. William H. Kilpatrick, one of Dewey’s pupils and colleagues, was one of the main theoreticians and most active implementers of the new method of teaching in the American schools during the antebellum period.¹¹² Before World War II this method became popular not only in America but also on the other side of the Atlantic. In Russia the project method had been put into practice already in the first decade of the last century, and there the emphasis was put on teaching children to live and interact in small communities—for which it was declared “socialist” and regarded with suspicion by the tsarist government.¹¹³ After the revolution it was welcomed by the new power and was broadly adopted as one of the main technologies of education—until the thirties, when it was denounced and accused of American imperialism under Stalin’s ministers of education.

The project method encouraged children to strive toward concrete achievements. Instead of seeing them study abstract and speculative theories, the pragmatic method motivated children to learn to perform

110 Ibid., 213.

111 On the history of “project method” in Russia see Marina Aleksandrovna Smirnova, “Vozmozhnost’ proektnogo obucheniia pri podgotovke studentov v tekhnicheskome vuze,” *Nauka, obrozovanie, obschestvo (internet jurnal)* (2006), <http://journal.sakhgu.ru/work.php?id=12> [accessed November 21, 2008].

112 See for instance William Heard Kilpatrick, *The Project Method: the use of the purposeful act in the educative process* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1929).

113 Such pedagogues as S. T. Shatskii, A.U. Zelenko, and L.K. Shleger have implemented the “project method” in Russia. See Mikhail Epstein, “Metod proektov v shkole dvatsatogo veka,” *Novaia evereiskaia shkola: pedagogicheskii alimnakh*, no. 11 (2002), <http://www.ort.spb.ru/nesh/njs11/epst11.htm> [accessed November 20, 2008].

various useful and purposeful social activities by interacting with the real world. Kilpatrick's subtitle for his "Project Method" treatise is "the use of the purposeful act in the educative process," and here he announces that "it is the purposeful act with the emphasis on the word 'purpose' that I myself apply to the term 'project.'"¹¹⁴ This idea that a project is the embodiment of a purposeful act was at the center of the pragmatic tradition. Pragmatist maxims called for a consideration of the practical effects that thinking has on everyday life, postulating that beliefs are rules for action and that philosophy, science, and art must play a definite part in improving everyday life.¹¹⁵ The early proponents of these views regarded them in terms of an intellectual tradition that must turn away from "abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions . . . from closed systems [and] turn towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action and towards power."¹¹⁶ Dewey's term for pragmatism was instrumentalism, and this was consistent with his and some of his Chicago colleagues' views that human creativity, as it becomes manifest in the arts and sciences, must not be regarded as an answer to metaphysical enigmas but as an instrument that can improve and enrich experience and everyday life. William James writes that pragmatism was nothing essentially new and that it harmonized with other "*anti-intellectualist* tendencies;" it "agrees with nominalism for instance, in always appealing to particulars; with utilitarianism in emphasizing practical aspects; with positivism in its disdain for verbal solutions, useless questions and metaphysical abstractions."¹¹⁷

Does the term "project" appear in the vocabulary of Moscow Conceptualism at the crest of another wave of Westernization or Americanization in Russia? How important is this question for a country whose modern history evolved at the crossroads of endless Westernizer-Slavophile debates? Leaving aside inquiries with broader implications concerning Russian identity, one may ask instead if there was a certain rationalistic or pragmatic effect on aesthetics and art. Can one draw a

114 Kilpatrick, *The Project Method: the use of the purposeful act in the educative process*, 4.

115 William James and Giles B. Gunn, *Pragmatism and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 25.

116 *Ibid.*, 27.

117 *Ibid.*, 28.

parallel with political and economic transformations and suggest that a transition also took place in art and aesthetics, a transition that challenged certain beliefs and assumptions regarding both? What if the sudden arrival of the notion of the “project”, especially when regarded in the pragmatist and instrumentalist sense, is a manifestation of a certain aesthetic transitology, one that discredited the belief that true art is a purposeless and completely disinterested activity belonging to the immeasurable realm of the spiritual—a conviction cultivated by the German Romantics that the Soviets also tried hard to eradicate by converting art into a weapon of the working class? In so quickly establishing its presence, did this notion—or, rather, did those who came increasingly to subscribe to it—insist instead that art, like other human activities, is to serve well-defined ends, be it the advent of democracy or of market relations?

What does the abrupt appearance of the new word “project” in the vocabulary of the Moscow conceptualists signify? Above all, Monastyrsky’s installation project *Journeys to the West* signaled the beginning of the country’s transition to a new cultural system. The new, or rather the old capitalist world returned to Russia with a new model of cultural policy. The term “project” points to the main regulatory mechanism of this new model, which conceives of artistic production in terms of fair competition among individual or collaborative enterprises. This transition may be described as a replacement of a totalitarian and dogmatic model with a new pragmatic model of cultural administration. The dogmatic model of Soviet cultural policy fed on the doctrine of Socialist Realism for its rules and principles of operation. For the dogmatic model the world of art and culture was either black or white, and this twofold division separated the cultural producers into official and unofficial, or into those who complied and those who did not. In the Soviet Union artists had not previously used the word “project”; this dogmatic model managed without projects, for it had been itself a metaproject that either incorporated or canceled every other individual project, endeavor, or initiative. It was sufficient to declare allegiance to the faith in this metaproject or, rather, Plan in order to be admitted to its benefits and privileges, which most of the artists (including also unofficial ones) did, with varying degrees of sincerity, for reasons of survival.

The new system of cultural policy that began to take shape in the nineties may instead be described as pragmatic in the way that individual artistic production is at the mercy of the unpredictable forces of the market. Artists submit projects in order to compete for cultural capital within the

open market for cultural goods. A project, which is an individual proposal that announces one's intention for entering and competing in this market, steps forward as one of the central mechanisms of this system. The term "project," which appears in the first installation proposals of KD artists and in the vocabulary of other Eastern European artists after 1989, reveals an essential instrument that the artists would have to master from now on. Its appearance was determined by the new local and foreign, private and public institutions that began to support art and culture after 1989. The word entered the artists' vocabulary at a time when a range of new institutions such as the Soros Foundation or the Soros Centers for Contemporary Art, the British Council, KulturKontakt, the Goethe Institute, Pro Helvetica, the Alliance Française, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and many other American, British, French, German, Austrian, Swiss institutions and agents of transition began to play a more significant part in the life of Eastern European artists, affecting their artistic and aesthetic programs.

KIEVOGORSKOE FIELD: FROM NO MAN'S LAND TO HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Kievogorskoe Field holds a special place in KD's aesthetics. It was where these artists had organized most of their actions during the Soviet period, and both the spectator-participants' reports and the artists' commentaries often reveal how dear this place was for these city dwellers who journeyed to this field in the middle of the woods in order to escape the everyday urban routine. In one of his early reports, Kabakov tried to understand what exactly made him so depressed and irritated in the so-called "domestic" works of KD, and so happy in the out-of-town actions.¹¹⁸ He came to the conclusion that it had something to do with the power of suggestion, as well as with the fact that in small spaces the dynamics of KD's actions were so intense that they filled the entire space, giving the audience no place to hide. Everything was different in the open air. The lengthy quotation that follows is from one of the reports written by Kabakov in the before period [1985]:

That pressure that I experienced under the influence of KD's actions

118 See Kabakov "Rasskaz ob aktsii 'Vorota'" in Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*

organized within a small space was the result of a horrible force field, one generated not by certain objects, as I had thought earlier, but by the action itself. I now understand why I felt such a comfort in the countryside. Because the movement is concentrated in one place—here is Andrei doing something, but over there Andrei is doing nothing. I felt comfortable because I could look at those places where there was no Andrei. Here is Andrei, over there he is not. How wonderful, how great! Everything's clear! Here is a piece of shit and over there is the river. For indeed, there are many of those who like to take a shit in the middle of nature. It is one thing to shit in the toilet—it is isolated, it is safe—but in some higher sense there is not much pleasure in it. In the meantime those who prefer to shit out in nature, they know what an unusual feeling of freedom and spaciousness this habit offers. In other words, to piss and to shit in nature is something incredible; it is a very special feeling. I remember an experience I had during a trip to Germany. I was with a German lady in the woods, and at some point I felt the need to go behind a tree. Of course, I apologized at first. But the lady waved her German hands in horror and said that shitting in the woods was not allowed. At the time I understood this gesture in terms of, "Oh my God!" What a high culture, what a high degree of civilization! I shouldn't even mention that they won't allow you to make fires, to collect and move brushwood from one place to another. I am not even sure if walking is okay. No, I think to walk is fine. Yes, to walk must be okay. It is alright to walk as long as you don't shit in nature. How is that?¹¹⁹

It must be stressed that this passage is one of the earliest writings in the *Journeys*, one in which the notion of "nature" is brought up, and this despite the fact that the group preferred to undertake its actions outdoors, in fields and woods. After 1989 [KD]'s relationship to nature would become problematic, and for the first time these artists would understand that Kievogorskoe Field, the main aesthetic firing ground of KD, was in fact a meadow in the woods. This shift may be illustrated using Ernst Bloch's example of the transformation of nature into landscape, an example later used by György Lukács, in *History and Class Consciousness*,¹²⁰ to criticize bourgeois thinkers' troubled relation to history.

According to Bloch, nature became landscape when the peasant's organic and unconscious life within nature was replaced by the externalizing relationship of the artist or of the bourgeois city-dweller to nature—a relationship that operates remotely, over the gap of culture. This space of culture turns the subject into an “observer” and the object into “landscape.”

If one extends this nature-to-landscape transition to Kabakov's fragment, it would imply that during that incident in the German woods, he realized that civilization and culture (or *Kultur*, in the sense that the German Romantics understood it) meant above all that one should not mar or soil nature but only observe, study, enrich one's self, and enjoy it; it was then that his personal transition from nature-to-landscape took place. This restriction imposed on the human body (in itself an extension of nature) is part of the argument offered by Horkheimer and Adorno in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in which Western instrumental reason is accused of hijacking the noble ideal of progress, leading to the enslavement and domination of nature by reason.¹²¹ Horkheimer and Adorno, who defined enlightened reason in terms of its modified attitude to nature, insisted that the Enlightenment had achieved a transition from a “mythic” attitude to nature based on a mimetic relation to it (imitating nature through rituals and ceremonies) to an “enlightened” attitude in which nature is perceived as raw material to be exploited and used for the benefit of the human race. The enlightened, instrumental approach turns nature into landscape, which like the romantic “culturescapes,” or the *Kulturlandschaft* constructed around ruins or medieval castles, is also to be perceived as a source of aesthetic pleasure.¹²²

By way of parenthesis, we must also not ignore the problematic aspect of the nature/culture opposition and of that ideal “state of nature” which some critical theorists invoke in their writings. It has been pointed out that the notion of “nature” in itself may be regarded as a romantic bourgeois projection, as a premediated cultural construct, and that accordingly this

120 György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971).

121 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1991).

122 Steven Vogel, *Against Nature: The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory*, SUNY series in social and political thought (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 52 and 87.

antithesis must be handled with care.¹²³ Be that as it may, I will keep this opposition, using it as a kind of ready-made concept in order to draw attention to another notable transformation that took place in the post-1989 *Journeys*.

KD's transition "from nature to landscape" began in the late eighties, on or around its main aesthetic ground: Kievogorskoe Field. We will return to this field, but only after discussing another action that took place in the second half of the nineties—not in Moscow but abroad, in Canada. It was in North America that the opposition between nature and landscape manifested itself most clearly. In 1999 Kizevalter, one of KD's members, who had settled in the nineties with his family in Canada, was asked to make another action for the series *Banner*. He had made works for this series before: In 1980, "when after completing his education, he was sent to work in the horrible Yakutia region,"¹²⁴ the rest of the group had asked him to put up in the taiga a banner they had sent to him, to photograph it from a distance without reading it, and then to send them pictures. The Yakutia banner read: "IN THE SPRING, AT THE EDGE OF THE FIELD, AMONG TREES, A WHITE BANNER WRITTEN IN RED LETTERS (950 X 80 CM) WAS PUT UP BY G. KIZEVALTER."¹²⁵ Nineteen years later the group in Moscow sent him another banner, this time to Toronto, asking him to do the same thing.¹²⁶ But *Banner-99 (Canadian)*, as the artists called this action among themselves, was not included in the seventh volume of the *Journeys*.¹²⁷ Monastyrsky's reason for its exclusion from the group's main body of work was the "technically incorrect execution of this action."¹²⁸ The Canadian Banner was also white, and the text on it

123 Commenting on the manuscript of this book, Fredric Jameson has drawn attention to the problematic aspect of the nature/culture opposition in the work of the Frankfurt School. This concerns in particular the idealist understanding of nature as a pure and unadulterated realm.

124 See Kordiashvili in Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: 1–5 vols.*, 205.

125 See the action online at <http://conceptualism.letov.ru/KD-ACTIONS-15.htm> [accessed January 19, 2009].

126 The *Banner (Lozung)* series is KD's most well-known and accessible work. It consists of a banner put up in the woods on the chance that a passerby, or in the group's terminology, an "anonymous spectator," would come across it and experience a conceptual or perceptual emptiness. See also above, Chapter 3 n. 5.

127 This action is not included in the list of KD's actions on its website, but is found in the appendix to the seventh volume of Monastyrsky's unpublished manuscript.

was written in English and in black letters: "ONE HUNDRED AND FIRST CHAPTER: HOW, IN THE CANADIAN WOODS, MR. KIZEVALTER HUNG UP A SLOGAN. 1999 FROM THE 7TH VOLUME OF JOURNEYS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE (e-mail: haensgen@osteuropa.uni-bremen.de)."

The "technical problem" that interfered with the unfolding of the action was caused by the new Western context, with which neither the Moscow group nor Kizevalter were familiar. During a big national holiday (Queen Victoria Day) Kizevalter took his family to a nearby island where he hoped to perform this action of the seventh volume. His later report to Moscow describes the process and the trouble he went through to make this action.

Finally we stopped by two trees. When I unfolded the banner and began to read it carefully I noticed the words "in the Canadian woods." I realized that we had not chosen the right place. This spot looked too civilized: in between the trees there were benches, a fence, and we could even see some houses far in the distance. We decided to fold the banner back up and leave... We spent the next couple of weeks in deep reflection, inquiring about a more appropriate place to put up this banner. It turned out, from the locals, that there are *no woods, in the proper sense, anywhere nearby*. There are parks, many of them, and the parks are divided from each other by developed areas. In the parks there might be "wild" uncultivated parcels. So we decided to take a look at them.¹²⁹

In the next paragraphs Kizevalter described how he and his family made a second attempt in a more woodlike glade that they finally found in Old Mills Park near Toronto. As they prepared to attach one edge of their white banner to a tree, suddenly an ice-cream sales person showed up from behind the bushes asking when the event would begin, and how many people were expected to show up. Kizevalter responded that it was unlikely that there would be any attendees. "The ice-cream person began pondering, while biting his lips, and all of a sudden asked us if we had a special permit."¹³⁰ The family explained that this was not necessary, for this was not an official event but an artistic action—"something like

128 See "Banner-99 (Canadian)" *Lozung-99 (Canadskii)* in the Appendix to the Seventh Volume (*Prilozhenie k razdelu*). Monastyrsky, "Poezdki za gorod: 6–10 vols." [unpaginated].

129 Banner 1999 (Canadian). Appendix to the Seventh Volume. Ibid.

130 Ibid.

a painting." After a few more questions and inquiries, the ice-cream man pushed his cart and disappeared into the bushes. Kizevalter could finally focus again on putting up the banner, which for many technical reasons did not hang as expected, but twisted and turned in the wind, making it difficult to photograph.

They finally succeeded, and even asked someone to take pictures, which Kizevalter sent home, but Moscow did not accept this action. Some years ago one could still come across this action on a Canadian website but it has recently vanished. The artists did not discuss what exactly had happened with the "Canadian *Banner*," and in this respect KD remained loyal to its hermetic system, which, as it was argued earlier, had to resemble that of the Politburo, for whom an antagonism or a problem was not to be solved but buried and forgotten. The "technical" problem mentioned by Monastyrsky must surely have been related to this incongruence between the Russian woods and the Western parks. For Kizevalter's action to have worked as it should near Toronto the artist should have submitted a project, in which he would have had to explain to the park authorities the significance of this event (e.g., to cultivate park attendees' awareness of contemporary art or to raise profits for those authorized to conduct business in the park), as well as to guarantee that no park rule or regulation would be broken. KD's actions ideally work in the Soviet or Russian context, and abroad only with authorizations or as arrested installations in the controlled climate of the neutral white cube.

The nature-to-landscape relation here translates into the problem of woods-to-parks. But this dependence of KD on the woods did not only disappoint the group abroad, but also at home. In a commentary to an action written in 1996 Monastyrsky confesses that the radical changes to which Kievogorskoe Field had been subjected in recent years had left a very strong impression on him.¹³¹ During the before period the Western part of the field was the most important area for KD; it was the place where most of the actions began, and where most of the time spectators gathered to observe or participate in the action. "I was shocked to discover that almost the entire Western part of the field was gone, and that what used to be a dense wall of trees had begun to show big open gaps."¹³²

In the after part of the *Journeys* both the artists and the spectator-

131 Monastyrsky "Rasskaz ob aktsii 'Negativy.'" Ibid.

132 Ibid.

participants from the Soviet period lament the disappearance of Kievogorskoe Field. In the second half of the nineties the field was acquired by realty developers, who began to cut down the trees, partitioning the field into lots for building Western-style villas. The artists complained that around the same time the field became very busy, with trucks and tractors sometimes appearing right in the middle of an action.¹³³ In the before-period these new elements on Kievogorskoe Field might have been called “inciters on the exposition semiotic field,” and may even have been taken into account; now, these were simply tractors, bulldozers, and dump trucks—tools of the emerging private real estate businesses—that did not motivate or add anything to [KD]’s post-1989 actions or to the process of exploring the nature of art. These changes resulted in fewer and fewer actions on Kievogorskoe Field in the late 1990s and the first decade of the present century.

The actions of KD began to lose their association with a definite place, first of all with Kievogorskoe Field, which for a long time had constituted KD’s field of action... This has a concrete, practical cause, namely: Kievogorskoe Field is disappearing. At this point [January 2004] it may not exist as such, but may have been completely covered with villas. This circumstance has conditioned KD to move aside, to try opening up and developing new territories adjacent to the field, to circle around the field, or to simply go off in search of a completely new place.¹³⁴

Figure 12 shows Kievogorskoe Field before and after 1989. The difference is above all graphic—a hand-drawn plan showing multiple locations of actions made on this field before, versus a satellite image showing a new suburban development afterward. In the Soviet period this field, which the artists believed to belong to the Williams Institute of Fodder, did not even have a name, and the designation “Kievogorskoe Field” was used only among the members and spectators of KD.

In Soviet times the out-of-town space was a no man’s land, a territory

133 Monastyrsky “Zametki o 7 Tome” 18.04.94. Ibid.

134 *Ulet* December 2003–January 2004. Ibid.

out of anybody's control and where there were no laws to be applied. This was its beauty; it was enough to get off the highway (the highway was still a public space controlled by the representatives of the state) and you would roll out of the social context into a *Urwald*, a primeval territory, a jungle, a taiga, a whatever. It was a case of a *tabula rasa*, of the blank page where one could construct whatever... And now this Russianized idyll started to fall apart, because every plot of out-of-town-ness has been sucked into the general context of civilization.¹³⁵

With the advance of privatization the artists were gradually pushed aside from Kievogorskoe Field and even their important category, "out-of-town-ness," began to take on new meaning.

The 1997 action *Library* (*Biblioteka*) was dedicated to Kievogorskoe Field. For it the artists chose "thirteen books with (mainly) ideological content, published during (1976–1996), a period in which KD's actions had taken place on Kievogorskoe Field (or near it)."¹³⁶ The first title, from 1976, was *Issues of Economic Management in Advanced Socialist Societies* by Brezhnev, which corresponded to KD's action from the same year, *Tent* (*Palatka*). The last book was *A Complete Reference Guide to Real Estate*, authored by G.H. Volochkov which corresponded to the 1996 action *Negatives* (*Negativy*). In these ten books the artists inserted photographs and text from their own actions and, after wrapping the books in plastic wrap and dividing them into five packages, they covered them in black tar and buried them in the woods next to the field, which was at that time already a construction site. In the same spot the artists also buried an electric watch, powered by a lithium battery that was to keep the watch running for ten years. Over the next decade the group returned to the same spot in the woods for a series of sequels based on the 1997 *Library*. In 2001 they unburied the electric watch for the action *Bag* (*Meshok*); in 2003, they made the action *14:07 – 15:13* (*Action with Clocks*); in 2005, they drew lots from a pack of Chinese postcards to see which of the ten books had to be unburied (it turned out to be *Chinese Documents from Dung Xua*); and, finally, in *Library 2007* they unburied the rest of the books. One package of books was missing.

The effect of transition on this group's "field of action" is significant.

135 *Ulet* December 2003–January 2004. Ibid.

136 See the description of the action "Library" and the complete list of books and actions on <http://conceptualism.letov.ru/KD-ACTIONS-81.htm> [accessed January 19, 2009].

The differences are obvious on the two maps (FIGURE 12). The map from before shows the group of KD artists immersed in the field, whereas the satellite map shows [KD] wandering around as if feeding on the energy that had been invested there in the past decades (see on the map the actions 625-520 and the *Library* sequel above). The 1989 drawing, which next to the satellite map looks like a peasant's plan for the rotation of crops, best illustrates KD's full immersion in its system, in its aesthetic nature. The second map, sent by a robot from satellite orbit, shows the artists wandering around their former field as if they were landless peasants during the industrial revolution. The two plans are confirmed by multiple voices that lament throughout the post-1989 *Journeys* the disappearance of the field, recalling with nostalgia the lost innocence of the state of nature. Only when this field was completely transformed did [KD] realize that Kievogorskoe Field had been the group's main "field of action;" it was its *Urwald*, its primeval taiga, its *tabula rasa*; it had, in other words, come to represent the very "nature" of the group's aesthetic and artistic system.

What I am suggesting here is that during the before period KD deployed, in several senses, a more "natural" aesthetics. One can argue for a higher degree of naturalness in their earlier volumes, based on the fact that the artists were less dependent on extraneous devices and techniques (such as photography or video), as well as on the fact that in this period their actions were more imitative and mimetic, and less conceptual. Horkheimer and Adorno have argued that it is mimesis that distinguishes the pre-Enlightened subject from the Enlightened one, where the former mediates its relation to nature by imitating it, resorting to various rituals and ceremonies. It was in its early actions that KD introduced its rituals, initiated its journeys outside the city, performed empty actions, and distributed parts of the factographical discourse to spectators. Some works from the early volumes attest to the notion that the function of art, was, as Ananda K. Coomaraswamy has put it, to "imitate Nature in her manner of operation." This was one of the central working postulates for John Cage, KD's main foreign influence, and Cage himself absorbed this principle from Coomaraswamy, who places it at the center of "Oriental aesthetics."¹³⁷ The variation on the idea of mimesis proposed by Coomaraswamy and then

137 See Sam Richards, *John Cage as* (Charlbury, Oxford: Amber Lane Press, 1996), 113. For Coomaraswamy's basic principle of "Oriental aesthetics" see Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956).

used by Cage is indeed not a Western one. The artist does not copy nature externally but seeks to imitate the very principles in which nature operates, attempting to “penetrate the nature of Nature,”¹³⁸ often resorting to the ritualistic and ceremonial practices used by cultures that employ this kind of aesthetics. This is the case particularly in some of KD’s early actions, such as *Appearance* (1976), in which both the artists and the spectators were encouraged to observe liminal perceptual states such as waiting, watching, listening—states that arise as a result of resorting to such elements as nonintentionality, unpredictability, and chance.

From its second phase on, the group began to depart from these early principles. Its gradual transformation may be regarded in terms of a transition from mimesis to construction, from an attempt to imitate, to the application of a more object-oriented constructivist approach. Their transformation may also be considered from the perspective of the Western tradition of aesthetics. Kant’s aesthetics in particular suits KD’s early actions in light of their distinguishing nonutilitarian principles, of their purposeless purposefulness and disinterested pleasure. As in Kant’s aesthetics, which is not an aesthetic of art but an aesthetics of nature and of natural beauty, KD’s early works, in particular those made during the first phase, may be regarded as ritualistic behaviors which are not yet indexed and pigeonholed into distinct rational categories or constructed according to pre-established rules and devices. Starting with phase two and increasingly into the eighth and ninth decade, KD began to lose this innocent “naturalness”; each of its new actions was now constructed within a framework established by previous actions, and was based within a continuing tradition understood as a kind of miniature institution. This transformation of a “natural” mimetic approach to a more constructive one might be imagined in terms of a transition from a Kantian to a Hegelian aesthetics, or to be more accurate, from an aesthetics to a philosophy of art. Not only did Hegel free Kantian aesthetics of its dependence on the notion of natural beauty (*Naturschöne*), but he also proposed a philosophy of fine arts as a branch of knowledge more suitable for dealing with the products of the human spirit. KD’s aesthetic and artistic development, as if it were following a certain historical logic, gradually became acutely aware of its past. As it did, the ritual mimesis of nature in the manner of its

operation gradually became a more schematic construction of reality, and action gradually congealed into installation.

This is not to suggest that Soviet citizens were living at the end of the twentieth century in a “state of nature,” even if a comparison of the available technologies for the domination of nature may sometimes create such an impression. To compare Soviet and Western technologies of conquering nature is to compare the kolkhoz semifeudal approach, which left Kievogorskoe Field for the most part unexploited, to the intricate sophistication of the real estate development business—the complex industry which has developed means of controlling every aspect of the landscape, from the color of the grass to the configuration of the foliage and the height of the trees. The very medium of the satellite map (Figure 12) shows a more complex degree of mediation, but this does not imply that before this field was unmediated. It was possible for KD to work undisturbed in the seventies and the eighties on Kievogorskoe Field not because of its pristine and untouched state but because of that lesser degree of exploitation and utilization of nature characteristic of a traditional, and noncapitalist society. The transition is not from nature to culture but from an early form and technology of mediating nature to a later and a more advanced one, which critical theorists associated with the Frankfurt School have called the “totally administered society.”

In KD's case the disappearance of Kievogorskoe Field behind the pink-painted facades of the new villas suggests the gradual dissolution of the Soviet context behind the new post-Soviet and Russian reality. The Soviet context constituted the true “nature” of KD, for its aesthetic system was constructed in a continuous mirroring of the totalitarian regime and its hermetic ideology. The transformation and literal fragmentation of Kievogorskoe Field may serve as a good visual metaphor for KD's *Journeys* and the entire aesthetic discourse in the after period. As a group that had emerged under the Soviet regime, [KD] strove to accommodate itself to the new socioeconomic conditions. With the gradual disappearance of a socialist approach to nature, it was left with little else than to drift around the new capitalistic landscape, performing on the margins and hiding in the woods next to the privatized Kievogorskoe Field. KD's aesthetic system, which had been assembled in accordance with what had been understood in Soviet Moscow as “private art”—lacked the necessary tools and devices to deal with the changing socioeconomic context in the next wave of Westernization of Russia. Some actionist and activist artists of

the 1990s and 2000s would have sprayed green dollar signs on the pink walls of these villas; they would have tried to bite their inhabitants, or have staged a demonstration. But KD's intellectual dissident aesthetics did not have such radical oppositional techniques in its toolbox.

A MORE COMFORTABLE JOURNEY: FROM PUBLIC TO PRIVATE TRANSPORTATION

Another important element in KD's discourse that changes considerably in the after period is the journey itself, a concept that is crucial for its aesthetic discourse and for its artistic practice. By the third volume the repeated journeying outside the city was recognized as KD's signature approach, and in subsequent volumes its artists made considerable efforts to present the journey as a new artistic genre (see Chapter 3). KD conceived of the act of journeying in terms of the frame built by the spectators as they anticipate the event that awaits them at the place of action. The emotional and mental energy spent in making assumptions and suppositions, the amount of hope or fear accumulated during the journey, in other words, must wrap and hold the eventful part of the action *per se* together.

In the first five volumes of the *Journeys* most of the spectators started their reports describing how they all met at the train station, enumerating all those who were already waiting under the clock, gradually leading the reader inside the train and offering a sense of the atmosphere inside the wagon, then concluding with a short presentation of topics and themes exchanged by the spectators as they journeyed into the "out-of-town-ness" facing each other. Most of their experience during the day (from meeting at the station until the evening, when they shook hands and left for home) was collective, and this was not so much of their own merit as it was a result of the conditions for prescribed communal life set under the Soviet order. The frame that the spectators assembled during each journey consisted of these collective experiences they were building together, piece by piece, as they waited together to arrive in the "out-of-town-ness," or as they returned to the city immersed in interpretations and comments on the action that they had witnessed or participated in.

During the nineties, and particularly into the new century, the experience of journeying to the place of the action changed:

Thus we arrived at the place of the action (somewhere in the region of

Lobni but it was not Kievogorskoe Field) by car: myself, Dasha, Andrei and Sereja with Panitkov. On the spot, there was another car and we saw Igor with Lena, Masha Konstantinovna and Julia Ovchinnikova. This pleasantly surprised me.¹³⁹

In the actions of the eighth and ninth volumes (1999–2003 and 2003–2006), spectators travel to Kievogorskoe Field, or to other locations of the action, individually. This transformation did not happen overnight but gradually, for during the late nineties the spectators still used public transportation to arrive at the field. For the 1996 action *Negatives*, spectators met at the station and the reports offer a glimpse of a changing Russia: “We arrived at the Savelovskaya train station, half an hour earlier, and we spent some time examining the new station decorated with marble inside and almost empty – only a couple of homeless persons without a distinctive age or gender carrying their possessions (the type ineradicable in Russia of the ‘wanderer’).”¹⁴⁰ In the late nineties but particularly into the next century, reports describe a different experience, as spectators arrived at the place of the action by car. Some spectators like Ryklin have noted this difference. “Whereas before we used to meet at the Savelovskaya train station and then travel by train to Lobni, from which we took a bus, these days,” in 2003, “the spectators are brought by cars.”¹⁴¹

Now, the journeys to the place of the action are faster and more comfortable. “Finally came Backstein,” recounts Ryklin, “who parked his *Zhiguli* [Lada] next to the hotel Cosmos, and we all got into his car and in fifteen minutes we had already reached the field of action.”¹⁴² Describing another action Ryklin writes: “...Alexeev gave a nine-minute speech in front of 15 spectators, brought to the place of action in 5 cars....”¹⁴³ The new way of journeying outside the city was not only faster but also more entertaining, as the spectator could now listen to the car radio, chat with the driver, or stare in silence out the window. The previous communal experience of

139 Leiderman, “Polet na Saturn.” 2004. (Volume Nine). Monastyrsky, “Poezdki za gorod: 6–10 vols.” [unpaginated].

140 Ryklin, “Dva Golubea” Report on the action *Negatives*. Ibid.

141 Ryklin, “Remembering Remembrance” (*Vospominanie o vospominanii*) *Journeys* (Volume Eight). Ibid.

142 Ryklin, “Raising” (*Podnatie*), report on the action *M. Ryklin*. Ibid.

143 From the description of the action “Second Speech” (*Vtoraia rech'*) (Volume Eight). Ibid.

the collective frame of action, which was conditioned by the confines of public transportation by train or by bus, and their complete immersion in a monotonous Soviet landscape, had dissipated, scattering into numerous individual experiences and choices dispersed throughout the cozy interiors of personal automobiles. Unlike the reports from the before *Journeys*—which often mention the collective experience in passing, as if each train journey had been the same and had therefore left little to discuss—the new reports appear as individual opinions and statements, each voicing distinct comments and responses to the action as well as succinct and wry backseat observations on the changing landscape of Moscow and its suburbs. Some describe “blocks of old structures from the Khrushchev and Brezhnev era interspersed with the nouveaux riches’ *buildingov*,” whereas others report on “the roads lined with empty billboards covered with plywood.”¹⁴⁴ Artists’ and spectators’ comments and reports on the new way of journeying also suggest a significant improvement in the living conditions and the lifestyle of the artists and the spectators, as when “suddenly Sheptulin showed up in his [Volkswagen] *Golf*.”¹⁴⁵ Others reported on some unexpected side effects of the new way of journeying to the actions:

I, like the other spectators, arrived at Kievogorskoe Field much later than the organizers. Their presence as well as their obvious intention to remain hidden was betrayed by two *Niva*(s) parked on the side of the road, one belonging to Panitkov and another to Elagina.¹⁴⁶

The new, fast, and comfortable journeying outside the city not only had a sociological effect, as it started to divide the collective of spectators into smaller and smaller groups or, rather, separate individuals dispersed into separate vehicles, but also had an aesthetic effect on [KD]’s action. That essential state of waiting, which constituted the frame in which KD’s actions were mounted and which in the Soviet period was assembled collectively,¹⁴⁷ was now to be constructed individually. The warm and

144 Alimpieva, report on the action “Fisherman,” and Alena Ivanova, *Rasskaz ob aktsii Meshok 03.03.02* (Volume Eight). Ibid.

145 Alexeev, report on the action “Second Speech” (*Vtoraya rech’*), and “Garages” (*Garazhi*) *Journeys* (Volume Eight). Ibid.

146 N. Sheptulin, “Rasskaz ob aktsii ‘Signal krasnoi treapki’ (Shvedagon k aktsii Mesto deistvia).” Ibid.

comfortable social isolation of the car, where even the arrangement of the seats prevents the face-to-face dialogue possible in the local trains, changed the character of the frame of action. The old solid frame, which was assembled from thoughts and feelings of expectation, excitement, and suspense shared among the spectator-participants while traveling to Kievogorskoe Field or other places of the out-of-town-ness, tends after 1989 to break into thinner and smaller individual frames that on the whole create the impression of disparate multicolored individual images fusing together into a stained glass window, into a kaleidoscopic whirl of opinions, views, and preferences.

THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF LANGUAGE

This mosaic quality passes on into the language of the artists and that of the spectators. The after-*Journeys* even reveal a certain confusion of roles—the voices of the artists and those of the spectators become easier to confuse. Before, in the first five volumes of the *Journeys*, there was a certain order of arranging the material. For instance, the section entitled “Descriptive Texts” (*Opisatel'nye texty*) was the artist's section, and included only technical material, documentations, and descriptions of actions, whereas the section “Participants' Reports” (*Rasskazy uchastnikov*) was the part of the *Journeys* consisting primarily of reports by spectator-participants and occasionally a comment by one of the artists. In the material of the seventh volume of the *Journeys*, a tendency to obscure this strict division and compartmentalization occurs. Texts that would normally be written for the “Participants' Reports” section are now produced by [KD] artists themselves. Ryklin mentions this fact in one of his reports:

The roles of the artist and the spectators became less differentiated ...So undifferentiated became the roles and the functions of the organizer (artist) and those of the spectators (participant) that, for instance, N. Alexeev, who was part of the artist group, wrote an article in the newspaper as if he were the only spectator and Monastyrsky the only author.¹⁴⁸

147 See Chapter 3.

148 Ryklin, “Dva golubea (rasskaz ob aktsii ‘Negativy’);” Volume Seven: Monastyrsky, “Poezdki za gorod: 6–10 vols.” [unpaginated].

The confusion persists throughout the entire seventh volume, and Ryklin must have had this new alteration of the *Journeys* in mind when he wrote that in some of the last actions it looked as if “one person has organized this spectacle for himself, but made sure to invite as many friends and acquaintances as possible.” Even the “inner circle of KD was in part turned into spectators.”¹⁴⁹

The gradual disappearance of the distinction between “artist” and “spectator” (which instantly brings to mind Beuys’s famous formula “Jeder Mensch ist ein Künstler” — “everyone is an artist”) is reflected first of all in KD’s use of words and in the categories in their vocabulary. The major category “artist” remained unchanged, and only the attributes that accompanied it (“contemporary,” “nonconformist,” “conceptual,” “Russian”) changed according to the circumstances, the theme of the text, or the exhibition. The category “spectator,” however, changed significantly, and this change comes as yet another sign of the liberalization of post-Soviet unofficial art in general and of KD and Moscow Conceptualism in particular. In the before-period KD had only two categories of spectators: the “spectator-participant,” which included the artists’ friends and acquaintances, and the “anonymous spectators,” or everybody else. Toward the end of the nineties Monastyrsky mentions in his texts “interested spectators,” (*zainteresovannye zriteli*),¹⁵⁰ “action spectators” (“*aktsionnye zriteli*”), “free spectators” (“*svobodnye*” *zriteli*) who witness the action but do not participate; “invisible spectators” (“*nevidemye*” *zriteli*), also called “Sorokin’s spectators” (after the writer Vladimir Sorokin), who are unfamiliar with the action’s plot, and the most disadvantaged category, “outsider spectators” (“*postoronnie*” *zriteli*), who have neither a chance to see an action nor the opportunity to familiarize themselves with KD’s documentation. These last have only read “literature,” in other words the published documentation.¹⁵¹ There is also the “gazing spectator (character)” (*smotreaschii zritel’ personazh*),¹⁵² including the numerous “Western spectators” (counted in hundreds) who pay hard currency to see an action performed on a theater stage (as in the 2001 Berlin action 623-

149 Ryklin, “Pivatizatsia pamyati; Rasskaz ob aktsii ‘Shvedagon k aktsii Mesto deistvia’” (Volume Seven). Ibid.

150 Monastyrsky, “Zametki o 7-tome” (Volume Seven). Ibid.

151 Hänsen & Monastyrsky, “O znachenie media v dokumentatsii KD” (Volume Seven). Ibid.

152 Monastyrsky, “Pole komedii i linia kartiny (commentarii k sheme)” (Volume Nine). Ibid.

520), or in the Georges Pompidou Center in Paris (as in the 2002 action *Archeology of Light* [*Arheologia sveta*]).

The exhaustive compartmentalization of the category of spectator echoes the increasing fragmentation of consumer preferences within market niches as well as the rapid changes that took place in the circulation, reception, and appreciation of the Collective Actions group. To this change the new institutions of transition, which dedicate time and resources to the education of a new public for contemporary art, also contribute. Paradoxically, in spite of this diversification, the artists of KD complain that over the years a “gradual ‘disappearance’ of the spectator from the demonstration field occurred.”¹⁵³ “Before,” writes Monastyrsky, “the spectators had to search for concealed meanings (which as a matter of fact did not exist) from one action to another, from one text to another, and most importantly they had to search for themselves within the ‘hidden’ layers of their consciousness, because it was precisely the consciousness of the spectator that was the primary object of representation of our actions.”¹⁵⁴ The reactions submitted by many new spectators to the after-volumes of the *Journeys* are often predictable and anticipated, for many of them attempt to impersonate the spectator-participants of the before-period whose responses had been made known and popular by the art historians and critics that followed KD after 1989.

[On the field] we, the young artists, who were attending the seminars “New Artistic Strategies” organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art and the Soros Foundation, were trying to keep together... We were attempting to anticipate “something” about which we had heard and read so much, and we were all worried that this knowledge would prevent us from having a “pure perception” and “pure experience.” We feared that we would not see “that,” and that we would be disappointed, or that we would somehow ruin the existing myth of KD. But there was also confidence in those who invited us, as well as in myself—it wasn’t in vain that I was learning performance art. “Everything will be all right,” I decided.¹⁵⁵

153 Monastyrsky, “Pole komedii i linia kartiny” (Volume Eight). Ibid.

154 Ibid.

155 E. Morozova, “Polomichestvo k moscham neubitogo medvedia; Rasskaz ob aktsii ‘Primechanie’ 31.03.99” (Volume Seven). Ibid.

The earlier spectator-participants were driven into the “out-of-town-ness” by their curiosity, their love for nature, or by the necessity of periodically meeting and communicating with like-minded friends. The new spectators, filtered into various new categories, arrived on Kievogorskoe Field with a more definite purpose or project in mind. While some wanted to participate in the rituals of the group, about which they had read or heard in seminars, workshops, and exhibitions organized by Moscow conceptualists at the new contemporary art centers, others sought to experience emptiness, Shunyata, or attain satori and the awakening of the self. KD’s artists were likewise aware that they were dealing with a new, less disinterested and more pragmatic type of spectator.

Among the new spectators there were many students from Moscow State University (MGU), where Lena Romanova teaches. They don’t understand anything. This is a different kind of audience. For our spectators it was always clear that we had to free ourselves, and that art exists for liberation. For the new spectators this is not the case. They keep saying: we don’t understand. Perhaps they lack a certain culture of perceiving this kind of thing, for these things happen so rarely. Art historians too—they don’t know what this is all about and they also say that they don’t understand. But what is there to understand? I don’t understand myself when they keep saying this. What do they mean by this, what is there that they have to understand?¹⁵⁶

The purposeless and empty quality of the previous journeys outside the city had made these trips enjoyable and valuable to the spectator-participant (see Kabakov’s participant report for the action *Appearance*, Chapter 3). The new, more pragmatic spectator, whom the artists sometimes called “free” and sometimes “interested,” entered the half-privatized field of KD’s action accompanied by the art historian, and together they demanded meaning. Nonunderstanding, by contrast, is one of KD’s main criteria and conditions for the successful unfolding of the action. Nonunderstanding is a necessary ingredient that must precede the action and then follow it long after, at least until the process of interpretation and commentary begins. Nonunderstanding is opposed to an understanding defined as

156 Panitkov, “Ob aktsiakh 7 toma ‘Poezdok za gorod’” (Volume Seven). Ibid.

"commentary that leads to neurosis,"¹⁵⁷ and the terminology of Moscow Conceptualism expresses this crucial opposition through the dichotomy "Guguta Syndrome" (*Guguta Sindrom*) versus "Teddy Syndrome" (*Teddy Sindrom*). These two syndromes were diagnosed by KD in the eighties, and were used extensively in the interpretative and critical processes of these artists. When the new free spectators present themselves on the field, where they seek instant gratification of their desire for meaning and purpose, they ignore the necessary element of nonunderstanding; they disrupt the necessary tension that must exist (and the longer the better) between understanding and nonunderstanding, between Teddy and Guguta.¹⁵⁸

The democratization or rather liberalization that the new paradigm of contemporary art permitted and encouraged in post-Soviet society allowed for a larger and a more diverse number of spectators to participate in the journeys, including persons from various socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, and even from different countries. This was quite different from the very select and hermetic circle of Moscow Conceptualism in the before-period. Contrasting the reports of the spectator-participants with those of the new spectators of the nineties reveals significant differences. The two groups of texts, divided by a decade, express different worldviews and sharply differ in character, content, details, and in the very manner of writing. The character of the reports written during the Soviet period may be described as metaphysical, romantic, and even poetic, for here the spectators meticulously describe perceptual states, emotional experiences, and instinctive and dormant feelings and thoughts, explaining them to themselves and to others by looking for traces and causes in the elements of KD's actions. (See participant report for the action *Appearance*, Chapter 3.) The earlier spectator-participants' reports, and those of Kabakov in particular, were descriptions of states of profound nonunderstanding. This was the ideal outcome of KD's actions.

The reports written for the after-volumes of the *Journeys* bring in new perspectives, invoking social and political realities but also focusing on more technical and procedural matters. The latter resemble, in some ways, reactions to a project proposal rather than to descriptions of actions, as many unfold on the level of the concrete and the factual instead of the

157 Hänsen & Monastyrsky, "Dialog ob esteticheskoi situatsii..." (Volume Eight). Ibid.

158 See these two terms in the Appendix.

interpretative or transcendental. This turn affects the course of the action and most often the process of interpretation, which is such an important component of the action. Monastyrsky often complains about the new spectators' interpretations and how eager they are to see in every action some current sociopolitical context—which the group tried very hard to avoid during the Soviet *Journeys*. For the 1998 action entitled *Pipe (Truba)*, filmed by the crew of the Franco-German TV network Arte, many spectators' interpretations evolved around Russia's economic role as a major supplier of raw material and energy.¹⁵⁹ The penetration of the political within the aesthetics of KD may be considered a sign of distress, for the Moscow conceptualists, like other cultural nonconformists and dissidents, had often affirmed that their opposition to the regime was never political but strictly aesthetic, thus making a clear division between these two domains.¹⁶⁰ But if KD did not come to the political, the political came to [KD]. The social and the political element seeped into the reports of its new spectators, but also into the texts of the artists. The artists' texts express dissatisfaction with many aspects of the transitional post-Soviet reality, often pointing to the invasion of cheap foreign products and especially to the culture industry that had crippled the group's context or "exposition field." Monastyrsky seems particularly annoyed by the noxious voices of the new Russian pop stars that trickle through the millions of cheap loudspeakers that invade the city, as well as by the ongoing "provincialization" of Moscow.¹⁶¹ He reaches often for political metaphors, as when he compares the shrinking size of Kievogorskoe Field to the dissolution of the USSR.¹⁶²

Even if KD artists still tried hard to suppress and resist the almost universal impulse to pay tribute and remain tied to the unofficial dissident tactics centered on the individual and to the group's characteristic narrative of personal liberation (to which KD often referred as "private

159 Monastyrsky, Foreword to the Seventh Volume. Ibid.

160 "We wanted to 'insinuate ourselves into' (*vlitsia*) the social and in this sense we have never been in opposition to the existing state order and we did not experience hostility to the accepted directions in official art. This is why we found absurd and unnatural our status as unofficial artists, and we found reasonable our open existence in society. Of course, we had our artistic position, but the subject of what we were doing was not an expression of opposition." Yuri Sobolev quoted in Eimermacher and Margulis, *Ot edinstva k mnogoobraziiu*, 53.

161 See the term "Peasants in the City" in the Appendix.

162 Monastyrsky, Foreword to the Seventh and Ninth Volume. Monastyrsky, "Poezdki za gorod: 6–10 vols." [unpaginated].

art”), the social and the political breaks through into its texts as well as into the writings of the new spectators. Unlike the previous reports by spectator-participants—which were often so tedious in their long and detailed descriptions of worries or personal feelings, or of the complete incomprehension triggered by an “empty action,” or by a “demonstration of the demonstration”—the new reports are more entertaining. They are easier and more enjoyable to read. Some describe a drunk woman lying in the snow right in front of the Savelovskaya train station, while others mention a scuffle between what appear to be bandits or gangsters. One report from this period starts in the following way:

Well, what can I write about? Shall I describe how we all took the train, and how we walked again in the snow, treading into each other’s footprints, and how we covered our feet with plastic bags to keep our feet dry, and how we drank straight from the bottle? All this has been described tens of times and everybody knows how all this is nice and friendly.¹⁶³

Leiderman, who wrote the above report and had attended KD’s journeys since the mid-eighties, was possibly exaggerating somewhat in maintaining that the spectators’ reports had described “tens of times,” for example, how they swigged vodka from the bottle. Neither the spectator-participants’ reports nor the artists’ texts from the Soviet five volumes of the published *Journeys* offer details on matters that did not concern the action. Reading the before-*Journeys*, the reader might ask himself how these artists spent so much time outside, in the cold, without something to warm them up, something that (knowing the context) would surely have been sorely missed. It turned out that they did in each case bring everything they needed, and today on KD’s website one can view old photographs of people picnicking during actions.¹⁶⁴ But the fact is that in the before-*Journeys* it is extremely rare—if not impossible—to find any reference to food, alcohol, tobacco, or any other form of relief, just as it is also almost impossible to come across bad language or swearing. In the Soviet *Journeys* there was an unspoken rule, a moral imperative that, like the unuttered principles of

163 Leiderman, “Rasskaz ob aktsii ‘Negativy.’” Ibid.

164 See the 1986 action Banner-86 [*Slogan-86*] at http://conceptualism.letov.ru/IV/losung-86/slides/loz86-juznaja_noch.html [accessed January 27, 2009].

the Politburo, kept everything irrelevant to art, aesthetics, or the future of the proletariat veiled and silenced. The sacred and the pure were not to be contaminated by everyday experience.

The volumes of the after-*Journeys*, by contrast, are open and democratic in allowing everything that has crossed the field of action, the demonstration field, or the mind of the reporter to exist. Both the artists' and the spectators' texts from this period abound in details: how they passed a bottle of vodka around while snacking on pickles; how they mixed gin with lemonade and drank as they walked; how some drank a shot or two before the action in order to deal with the frustration of trudging through deep snow or mud; how someone—whose anonymity I maintain—even got very drunk in the bus on the way back; and how during some difficult days one particular member of [KD] started to drink beer very early in the morning. The manner of writing is also more entertaining, and many spectators express their individuality through the text, working with elements of style, making puns, using English words in Russian transcription (e.g., *buildingi*, *businessy*, *kontemporary art*); in short, treating their textual experiences with postmodernist ease and irony. Many reports begin with epigraphs from the likes of Jules Verne (*Around the World in Eighty Days*) or Borges (*Tlön Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*), and references to Kafka, Deleuze, Heidegger, or Clint Eastwood confer on these late texts the aura of critique. These writings are no longer descriptions but rather interpretations and theoretizations within a larger, globally cultural context. A series of new words from this new world draw attention to themselves as they flood the artists' commentaries and the spectators' reports, mixing up with old and new concepts from the *Dictionary of Moscow Conceptualism*: honorarium, vodka, "empty eternity," "Contemporary Artist," gin, Japan, Taiwan, Germany, Americans, *Śūnyatā*, *moksha*, feast (*zastolie*), Europe, Switzerland, Sweden, Israel, lavish lunch in Italian restaurant, Kagor (Moldovan wine), beer, vodka and pickles, "Local-Lore-ness," Soros, Soros Center for Contemporary Art and Soros Foundation, new artistic strategies, grant proposal, curators, Halls cough drops, cell phone, "Onanium," "Obsosium," "U-Topos," Niva, Golf [Volkswagen], new white Volvo, Karelia cigarettes (slim), Borges, Jewish artists, Billboard, Chukchia, 150 rubles per hour, Corel Draw, Google Earth, NATO, Gulag, GPS 12 XS (*Garmin*).¹⁶⁵

165 Some of these words set in quotation marks are concepts from the *Dictionary of Moscow Conceptualism*. See the Appendix.

These words denote new ideas, influences, and forces that made their way into the after-*Journeys*, not only pointing to the most recent objects, gadgets, materials, and strategies that these artists had integrated into their discourse, but also suggesting that a series of new and pressing social issues—such as nationalism and globalization, new commodities and institutions, or the invisible hand of the market and the latest state policies—had expanded the horizon of [KD]’s discourse, radically altering the art of journeying outside the city.

Afterword
FROM KD TO [KD]: FROM OBJECTIVATION TO REIFICATION

Moscow conceptualists use the metaphor of a stone thrown into the air to describe the previous one hundred years of Russian art. At the origin of the stone's trajectory stood the Russian historical avant-garde which had forcefully propelled the stone high into the air; when it began to lose speed, reaching the vertex of the parabola, it represented the Zhdanovist doctrine of Socialist Realism at its height; the response of the stone to the law of gravity and its return to the ground corresponded to the downfall of Socialist Realism and the beginning of post-World War II unofficial art (the modernists of the 1950s and 1960s) that concluded with the art of the Moscow conceptualists, who prided themselves on being the ones who had followed the stone back to where it had been at the beginning of the century.¹

There is in this metaphor of the stone something dialectical about its movement, something that may bring to the mind the Hegelian historical journey of the Spirit in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. In Hegel's journey consciousness constantly objectifies and alienates itself in its interaction with the external world, following a trajectory but then returning, like the stone, back to its point of origin. The journey of the Spirit is a transition through various stops, called shapes of consciousness, which emerge as a result of the objectification that consciousness performs in the process of acquiring knowledge of the object. In some respects KD's *Journeys* resembles *Phenomenology*, for it presents the journey of an artistic consciousness as it hardens and freezes into phases, stages, or steps during its transition through the abrupt successions of history in order to return into itself.

¹ Kabakov uses this metaphor in the dialogue "Spectator-Character" recorded by Monastyrsky in 1988. Monastyrsky, "Poezdki za gorod: 6–9 vols." [unpaginated].

In their critical response to Hegel, Marxist critics have used the concepts of alienation and reification, and they have done so also to distinguish among various forms of relations that occur between individuals in modern society or, in the context of labor, between producer and the product. In critical theory this distinction received particular attention in the work of György Lukács,² who initially used the terms “objectification” and “alienation” synonymously, and ceased to do so after he read the unpublished writings of the young Marx (the *Paris Manuscripts*).³ Later, Peter Berger and Stanley Pullberg would distinguish between objectification and reification in a more detailed and complex manner using the terms *objectivation*, *objectification*, *alienation*, and *reification*.⁴ *Objectivation* is pure production; *objectification* involves the act of cognition and suggests the distance that emerges between the process of production and the product; *alienation* refers to the situation in which the unity between the process of producing and the product has been broken; finally *reification* is “the process of alienation in which the characteristic of thing-hood becomes the standard of objective reality” or, to put it in other words, “reification is objectification in an alienated mode.”⁵

Objectivation and objectification are value-free and anthropologically necessary. Objectivation defines the subject’s intentionality and its exterior motivation for interacting with the world. It is that aspect of human nature which defines a human being as a world-producing being, *homo faber*. “Objectification,” on the other hand, “is a narrower epistemological concept and refers to the way in which the world produced by man is apprehended by him.”⁶ This meaning is closer to the Hegelian use of the term, expressing the very processes of naming, of knowing and of communicating knowledge to others. To objectify means to make various aspects of reality objects for consciousness. Objectification, which implies a distance between subject and object, or between producer and product, conveys that the subject, or the producer, is still in full control over the distance that inevitably occurs

2 György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*.

3 On Lukács’s confusion of “objectification” with “alienation” see Lee Congdon, *Exile and Social Thought: Hungarian Intellectuals in Germany and Austria, 1919–1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 81.

4 Peter Berger and Stanley Pullberg, “Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness,” *History and Theory* 4, no. 2 (1965): 199.

5 Ibid., 199–200.

6 Ibid., 200.

between the subject and what has been objectified. Objectivation and objectification are thus a *priori* conditions, and human existence cannot be conceived without them.⁷

Reification, on the other hand, involves the alienation of objectified reality; it is the process of forgetting the intimate relation between the subject and the object, or producer and product. Reification is separation and detachment, and it brings about an apprehension of the product as something independent of the producer. It is the Marxist tradition that makes the clearest distinction between neutral and value-free objectification on the one hand and value-laden reification on the other.⁸ In the economy of exploitation the process of reification is regarded as key, for it permits social relations to be objectified, alienated, and then presented as if independent of their social origin. Actions are perceived independently of actors, and products independently of producers. The modern state, in itself a reified force, resorts to reification in order to bestow ontological status on social roles and rules, on forms of behavior and activity, as well as to maintain the coercive instrumentality of various social, political, and economic institutions by presenting them as indisputable givens.

The relations that prevailed during the early phases of KD—those between the artist and the work, or between the producer and the product—may be summoned under the first concept of objectivation. During their first phase (1976–80) the group's artists undertook pure actions; they were not yet concerned with naming things, and even when they did, these names were not deliberately recorded in order to be communicated to other participants. This was also the stage when the group did not yet have an established name to describe its odd activities, to which its members referred inconsistently by such terms as “works” (*raboty*), “things” (*veschi*) “performances,” and “stagings” (*postanivki*). During this phase of objectivation KD had not yet instituted what it called its factographical discourse, and neither had it formed the habit of producing, gathering, and collecting material for the *Journeys*. At that stage of their practice, which cannot yet be called with confidence “artistic” or “aesthetic,” but

7 Ibid., 201.

8 Non-Marxist thinkers, for instance, tend not to make this distinction. For example, Hannah Arendt uses reification in terms of “fabrication, the work of *homo faber*,” which is in fact what the Marxists call objectification. Her example is that when a carpenter creates a table he reifies above all his idea of a table, his intention, his mental image. Quoted in Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, “Rethinking Reification,” *Theory and Society* 16, no. 2 (1987); 268.

perhaps “pre-art” (or *Vorkunst*, borrowing from Hegel), its artists were concerned with observing liminal perceptual states, aiming, in a Zenlike manner, to reach a prereflective condition, a state of pure duration. Their experience at that time resembled a collective meditation—one of the oldest practices employed to guard against alienation and to reach pure, dereified experiences.⁹

The relations that developed in the second phase and in the rest of the Soviet period (1980–89) between the KD’s members and their work unfolded under the sign of objectification. A series of significant additions that emerged during the second phase suggest an epistemological twist that corresponds to the notion of objectification: the appearance of the factographical discourse as a new significant layer in the group’s actions; the decision to write theoretical texts, introductions, reports, and commentaries (written retrospectively to also include the group’s first phase); and, finally, the chronological assemblage of this material into the separate volumes of the *Journeys Outside the City*, which together with the archive MANI began to carry out the function of art criticism and historiography. There was also the invention of a series of concepts and terms intended to name and to communicate some of the nonmaterial manifestations of the action and its effect on others. Finally there was the artists’ decision to adopt a name and call themselves “Collective Actions,” as well as to define their activities in terms of “actions.” All of these tend toward the proliferation of discourse, knowledge, and critique, which are at the core of the process of objectification. This period also saw a series of literal objectifications, as actions, concepts, and relations were produced as concrete artistic objects and given autonomous aesthetic status. Thus one may subsume those processes that accompanied KD’s work from the before-period of the *Journeys* under the concepts of objectivation and objectification—two necessary conditions of KD’s artistic emergence and existence.

The processes that began to take place during the transition and in the after-*Journeys* are best characterized using the categories of alienation and reification. While Berger and Pullberg present alienation in terms of the process by which the unity of production and product is broken, reification is a moment in the process of alienation when something is

9 See J. Robert Moore, “Dereification in Zen Buddhism,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (1995): 708.

conceived of as real only if it has the character of a thing.¹⁰ From 1989, as I have mentioned, some of KD's artists channeled their Soviet heritage into the gallery space, as many actions tended to become installations. Unlike in previous phases—when, although the actions were sedimented into objects, the artists remained in control of the actions—the transformations that took place after 1989 resulted in the alienated separation of the process of production from the product. This is manifest not only in the literal estrangement of the artists from the exhibition site, which operates on a certain institutional schedule, but also in the artists' estrangement from Kievogorskoe Field, privatized as it was by developers, and finally in the discursive regime the white cube imposed. Before, the artwork and KD were in the same place; it was the "here and now" of Kievogorskoe Field that conferred on these works the aura of authenticity. The transition to the gallery space and to the museum resulted in the delegation to the institution of the power to authenticate. The institution had now acquired, or purchased, the right to assign an aura, making the presence of the artist in this space unnecessary.

*"Reification converts action into process, which is precisely the core of its social functionality ... inasmuch as this defines action without the actor, or praxis without its author."*¹¹ Increasingly after 1989, KD's actions became components, sets, parts, objects of display, or projects, and as such they were disguised and often lost within the intricate exchange system of the culture industry. As parts, they risked being forgotten, becoming subject to the impersonal forces of the art market and its multiple laws (demand, inflation, recessions, and so forth). The dialectically complex field that formed the totality of the group's actions in the before-period, with its multiple layers of interactions and integrations, became a series of simplified causal processes that could run only within the sterile context of the gallery or contemporary art center. The process of reification is manifest in Monastyrsky's indexation of KD's activity and in the attempt to measure the creative act in positivistic values, figures, and percentages. It also transpires in the project method, discussed above, that art institutions required in order to preempt unpredictability and surprise, as well as in the predictable and ready-made behavior of the new spectators, who began to attend KD's actions with preconceived notions and expectations, not

10 Berger and Pullberg, "Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness," 200.

11 Ibid., 208.

experienced directly but gathered from the proliferating literature on KD. Such literature collects and then releases into the cultural circuit concepts and terms detached from the original work or action.

The accelerated process of reification in the post-1989 period was conditioned first of all by a sudden adjustment of the artists' social status. After 1989 the artists were no longer "unofficials," known only to a small circle of Moscow conceptualists and to the security committees, but emerged as officially recognized artists, both at home and abroad. They appeared as the victors in an aesthetic battle with the cultural policy of the old regime, and the processes of alienation and reification were the price they had to pay for their success. KD is now recognized as a key player in preparing the ground for a new post-Soviet cultural infrastructure,¹² and institutions are the very realization of reified experience. In this new role KD no longer needs to *act* (partly because the Soviet context that conditioned its actions has long disappeared); instead its members *perform* themselves as acting or reenacting collective actions in order to maintain the old myth as well as their new status—a version of what sociologists call institutionalized or habitualized experience. Indeed, KD has been invited to perform before large audiences at respectable art centers and in theaters; and its work has been projected and discussed even in Moscow nightclubs.¹³ The last volumes of the *Journeys*, which document works produced in the twenty-first century, offer some glimpses into the group's new experience:

The break with [Kievogorskoe] field has led to a completely new sphere of activity for the group: for the first time KD has entered into the public space. It is true that even in the old days some of our actions took place in the city [e.g., *Stop [Ostanovka]*, *Group-3 [Gruppa 3]*], but those were completely hidden in the space of the city; those actions were deliberately made in such a way that they could not have been easily detected as unusual behavior. The new situation is very interesting: KD on stage! This has never

12 Bobrinskaia, "Kollektivnye deistvia kak institutsia." <http://www.guelman.ru/xz/362/xx23/xindx.htm> [accessed September 12, 2008].

13 The action *625-520* took place in a theater in Berlin, 2001. *51 [Archeology of Light – 2]* was performed in front of a large audience at the Center Georges Pompidou in Paris (2002). The 1985 action *Barrel [Boch'ka]* was shown and discussed in the nightclub Sinyi Fantom for the Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art in 2007.

happened before... But the first public presentations have shown that the aesthetics of KD is strong enough to deal with the new and peculiar situation ...although it must be said that in some cases we feel the new context is really advancing on us.¹⁴

Theodor Adorno believed that it is the immanence of society in the artwork and not the immanence of the artwork in society that constitutes art's essential relationship to the social.¹⁵ In KD's before-period the emptiness of the Soviet context and the Party's wooden language was immanent in the content, format, and syntax of KD's actions, as well as in the impassive and often absent language of the *Journeys*. During this period KD built its artistic practice and aesthetic discourse on a conscious and deliberate self-identification with the system. After 1989, KD's art entered *into* society. KD's products now circulated within the system of cultural exchange, but at the cost of being detached and estranged from their producers. In the later volumes of the *Journeys* the post-Soviet transitional society appears in glimpses, fragmented and dispersed, or—depending on how one prefers to regard these processes—with multiple prospects. It is a matter of interpretation whether multiple fragmentations are a new feature of society reflected in their work, or instead a result of KD's ambivalences and lack of proper tools to comprehend, affect, relate, or mirror the new context in its totality. I would argue that it is the latter. For example, although after 1989 KD compiled another five volumes of the *Journeys*, art historians and critics remain, for the most part, more interested in the sixty-one actions assembled for the first five volumes—the only material that has been published to date in the format of a book, as the group had always envisioned. Today even critics close to this tradition regard the Moscow conceptualists as “angels of history” or preemptively regard this cultural tradition as “a historically concluded phenomenon.”¹⁶

14 Monastyrsky “Ulet” (Volume Eight) 2003–4 in Monastyrsky, “Poezdki za gorod: 6–10 vols.” [unpaginated].

15 Theodor W. Adorno, Gretel Adorno, and Rolf Tiedeman, *Aesthetic Theory, Theory and history of literature*; v. 88 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 232.

16 See Groys et al., *Die totale Aufklärung: Moskauer Konzeptkunst 1960–1990*, 34. For “angels of history” see Backstein and de Baere, *Angels of History: Moscow Conceptualism and its Influence*.

The trajectory of the thrown stone, with its “classical” ascendance, transitional apex, and restorative descent—where the initial ascent is endlessly recontextualized and glorified—works as a metaphor not only for the development of KD but also for that of many other official and unofficial artists both East and West. The evolution of KD and of its aesthetic discourse appears to obey a more general pattern followed by broader cultural processes not limited to the post-Soviet context. Britta Wheeler examines, for instance, the process of institutionalization of performance art in the United States.¹⁷ She divides the last half of the twentieth century into four stages, arguing that performance art has evolved from a live, spontaneous, impulsive, and disinterested artistic activity into a highly procedural and purposeful, even profit-oriented set of institutions and enterprises.¹⁸

17 Britta B. Wheeler, “The Institutionalization of an American Avant-Garde: Performance Art as Democratic Culture,” *Sociological Perspectives* 46, no. 4 (Winter 2003).

18 Ibid. During the first stage of the 1960s and early 1970s, artists inaugurated new informal venues outside the official framework of the culture industry—or, to use KD’s terminology, the American artists journeyed outside the city. The performances, actions, and happenings took place in studios, storefronts, or on the streets, and many artists occupied abandoned warehouses and turned them into collectively and democratically run art spaces that offered to many the opportunity to produce and exhibit. It was in these abandoned factories and warehouses that the first women’s studio workshops (e.g., the Woman’s Building in Los Angeles) and the earliest radical feminist performances took place, often undocumented and unrecorded. The second phase of development of American performance art (1978–83) may be compared to the emergence of KD’s factographical discourse and the newly discursive format of *Journeys Outside the City*. This is the objectification stage, marked by the appearance of the *High Performance* quarterly in 1978 in California. During this phase many of those artists who had established artist-run spaces and initiatives in prior decades began to adopt more traditional patterns of organization, seeking a different institutional status in order to establish a platform for dialogue (e.g., the National Association of Artists’ Organizations), as well as to apply for funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), which had established a new category of funding, for performance art, called “interarts.” (497–8) In the second phase many established artistic venues embraced a more democratic or even populist approach. Stage three (1983–1990) is marked by a greater concern for satisfying the needs of the audience, and many artists began to cross over into Hollywood or began to perform in nightclubs for wide audiences that include both punks and U.S. senators. This is the phase of alienation, when the unity between the producer and the product but also between the artist and the audience has been broken; many performances were staged for the audience rather than made to directly interact with it. The last phase of Wheeler’s article is entitled “Post-Culture Wars Fragmentation and Revitalization (1991–2000).” This is the final stage, reification, during which performance art became increasingly institutionalized, fragmenting into various fields within the elite art world, as well as into multiple niches of the growing

Although no large-scale festival of collective actions or new university program has yet been instituted in Russia, as happened in the United States, some of the processes that have accompanied KD's trajectory bear a clear resemblance to the ones taking place in America. Comparing the *Journeys* to developments in the U.S. and other Western art centers, one might conclude that when it comes to adjustments to global capitalism, the peripheries lag behind by about a decade. More recently, however, the Moscow conceptualists have voiced their concerns about the overall direction of these transformations. After 1989 Moscow Conceptualism found itself part of a new structure called "contemporary art," and to have left its previous "unofficial" status behind. For most of the decade this fact went unnoticed, and only relatively recently have some artists and critics begun to express disappointment, trying to distance themselves from the new cultural paradigm.

The misfortune of Moscow Conceptualism was that it was inscribed in the orbit of the phenomenon known as "contemporary art," to which it is deeply antagonistic. As a typical Moscow conceptualist I never could stand contemporary art. I never attended exhibitions... Contemporary art in the form in which it exists today represents one aspect of the colonial structures that are being imposed on all colonized territories together with McDonald's and other things... The *plein air* painter who is daubing his birches somewhere in the woods is today the real revolutionary and the antiglobalist.¹⁹

sector of alternative culture. Performance art began to be employed as a "therapeutic process of community development," and for many other pedagogical and practical matters. Public radio and television reported on large-scale performance art events, such as the Cleveland Performance Art Festival, and New York University launched performance studies as part of its interdisciplinary academic program. [507]

19 Pavel Pepperstein, "Sotsiologia moskovskogo kontseptualizma," *Khudozhestvenyi zhurnal*, no. 69 [Noeabr' 2008]. <http://xz.gif.ru/numbers/69/soc-conc-msk/> [accessed January 23, 2009].

The point must be made, however, that such a dire dissatisfaction with “contemporary art” is also a relatively recent phenomenon. Moscow conceptualists have contributed to, and have even been actively involved in, the creation of the first foreign and domestic institutions to promote their work under the mainstream appellation “contemporary art.”²⁰ In the late nineties the foreword of the *Dictionary of Moscow Conceptualism* stated that “for the last quarter of the century the notions Moscow Conceptualism and Russian Contemporary Art have been synonymous.”²¹

More recently Kabakov has expressed his disappointment with the bourgeois hypocrisy of the contemporary art industry that puts economic concerns over artistic ones.²² Monastyrsky’s messages are somewhat more puzzling, for he declares that the “discourse of contemporary art, as a single ideologeme, had already ended in the mid-nineties,”²³ despite the fact that the twenty-first century has seen numerous new contemporary art centers, galleries, and biennials, not to mention the Russian state’s move to award contemporary art prizes annually. Groys is more theoretical but not more optimistic. In a recent analysis he presents “contemporary art” as a separate entity, detaching it from both “postmodernism” and “modernism” and presenting it as a cultural paradigm obsessed with the

20 The magazine *A-Ya* was launched in order to “inform the reader about the artistic creativity and developments in contemporary Russian art.” *A-Ya*. (Elancourt, France: Boris Karmashov, 1979). The “Contemporary Russian Art Center of America” that opened in New York with support from the Cremona Foundation was also dedicated to Russian contemporary art. See Chapter 2 n. 7. In Moscow the first institutions of contemporary art were opened during the 1990s by those who were part of Moscow conceptualist circles. The Institute of Contemporary Art launched in 1991 in Kabakov’s studio and the New Strategies in Contemporary Art, a postdoctoral program financed by the Soros Foundation Moscow in 1995, were initiated by Joseph Backstein. In addition, many Moscow Conceptualists have benefited from or participated in numerous activities of the Soros Centers for Contemporary Art Network and the Soros Foundation.

21 Joseph Backstein in Monastyrsky, *Slovar’ terminov moskovskoi kontseptual’noi shkoly*, 15.

22 See dialogue between Kabakov, V. Tupitsyn, and M. Tupitsyn in Tupitsyn and Kabakov, *Glaznoe iabloko razdora*, 106–117.

23 Monastyrsky, “Ob aktsii ‘625-520’, ‘Meshok’, i ‘pustom deistvii’” [Volume Eight] Monastyrsky, “Poezdki za gorod: 6–10 vols.” [unpaginated].

presentation of the present.²⁴ He ponders over the new type of artist who has replaced the former producers, insisting that “the contemporary artist is rather a consumer, analyst, and critic of images and texts produced by contemporary culture, and I doubt that this role of the contemporary artist can change in the foreseeable future.”²⁵ These voices of dissatisfaction join the wave of criticism that has emerged in the last decade, especially at the peripheries of Anglo-American culture.²⁶ Increasingly the Moscow conceptualists, who have always insisted that their opposition to the Soviet regime was aesthetic rather than political, are remembering the socialist past with nostalgia, something that would have been difficult to imagine twenty years ago. Some of them speak today like their former opponents, the socialist realists, at one of their Party congresses, arguing, “Only in the conditions of socialism could humans withstand existence as such. . . . Only a return to socialism may place the inheritance of Moscow Conceptualism in its right context.”²⁷

The stone of Russian art has fallen back to the ground, though not at precisely the same place.

24 “Today the term ‘contemporary art’ does not simply mean art made in our time. The contemporary art of today is a method by which contemporaneity presents its essence—the very act of presenting the present (*akt prezentatsii nastoiashchego*). In this regard *contemporary art* is different both from *modern art*, which was oriented to the future, as well as from postmodern art, which was a historical reflection on the subject of the modernist project. *Contemporary art* gives preference to the present over the future and the past. Thus in order to correctly characterize *contemporary art*, it is necessary to follow its relation to the modernist project and its evaluation of postmodernism. Boris Groys, “Topologia sovremennogo iskusstva,” *Khudozhestvennyi zhurnal* 61–62 (2006).

25 Boris Groys, “Moskovskii kontseptualizm: 25 let spustia,” in *Moskovskii kontseptualizm*, eds. Dyogot and Zakharov, World Art Muzei no. 15–16, 24.

26 See for instance an interesting (but completely ignored within the Anglo-American art circles) debate that took place in France under the title “La crise de l’art contemporain,” see Yves Michaud, *La crise de l’art contemporain: utopie, démocratie et comédie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997); Yves Michaud, *L’art à l’état gazeux: Éssai sur le triomphe de l’esthétique* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2003); Christine Sourjins, *Les mirages de l’art contemporain* (Paris: Table ronde, 2005).

27 Pepperstein, “Sotsiologia moskovskogo kontseptualizma.”

Appendix
DICTIONARY OF MOSCOW CONCEPTUALISM

Editor's Preface
ANDREI MONASTYRSKY

In the origins of this project lies a very simple consideration—namely, that conceptual art deals primarily with *ideas* (and most often with *ideas of relations*) and not with the world of objects and its long-established paradigms of naming. Since the world of ideas (especially the ideas of relations and the relations among ideas) is in a certain sense “nonexistent,” the methods of “reproducing” it—if one makes use of an analogy with what we habitually say about the world of “existing” objects—are significantly different from the methods used or accepted in the so-called “everyday world.” But let us not dwell too long on the general features and the specifics of conceptualism as an artistic direction. It should suffice to say that in the aesthetics of conceptualism (as in the philosophical aesthetics that corresponds to it) there is a constant attempt to “reproduce” those structures of consciousness that in some form or another are nevertheless “present” in the world; moreover, to reproduce these structures as they perceive themselves within this world, in their endless acts of self-conscious reproduction.

In Moscow Conceptualism, as presented in the *Dictionary of Moscow Conceptualism* what takes place is not only the naming of some “mental worlds” and of their “inhabitants”—for the most part one witnesses a process of continual research and the construction of an aesthetic discourse, with its methods and principles, which I believe is the central motive of conceptualism. Of course, one also encounters in this dictionary such terms as “Rotten Pinocchio” (*gnilykh buratin*), but from the strangeness of such terms and from their character it is easily understood that they are mere products of ironic fancy. However, such fancies and fantasies are wholly integral to conceptualism as a direction in art (but not in philosophy). Here, in contrast to philosophy, we are dealing with the *poiesis* of notions. If there is such a phenomenon as “philosophical

poetics” then it is conceptualism (at least, in the “theoretical” aspect that this dictionary presents) that emphasizes the poetics: as the emphatically nonexistent that from the beginning requires an unwarranted credulity, and only after that, understanding. So then—conceptualism as the poesis of philosophy. It is precisely this, in my assessment, that the reader is dealing with here. And it is exactly from this perspective that Moscow Conceptualism is presented in this book.

The dictionary is assembled according to the following principle: it contains, first, the general or the main section, where the terms are introduced together with their definitions. All the definitions (except in specified cases) are written by the authors of the “terms” (or “words and phrases,” since many readers would hardly agree with the choice of “term” for most of the words presented here). For this section I had to make some restrictions, first of all with regard to myself and to Pavel Pepperstein. It turned out that both of us had too many terms, and if we had brought all our terms into the main section then the presentation of the authors would have been imbalanced. Some authors have just one term. In Pepperstein’s and my own case it is easy to explain this seemingly boundless pleonasm. This is because we are both members of artists’ groups; he is a member of Medgerminevtika (MG) and I of the Collective Actions group (KD). Perhaps because both of us are “poetically oriented,” we were—in a certain sense—compelled to “lead” when it came to constructing the ideologies and the discourses of these two groups. I came to conceptualism from poetry, and Pavel is still writing poetry and prose. Every group is connected by one (or several) ideas. If such shared ideas do not exist, or if they are quickly exhausted, then the group falls apart. Unlike a group of tourists setting off on a trip, when a group of artists begins its *aesthetic* journey it has two kinds of maps: one is of the usual and “objective kind,” as it consists of artistic gestures, commercial purposes, and so forth. An *aesthetic* journey is a journey between “earth and sky,” and the second “sky” map must be continually updated during the trip. Initially this map consists entirely of white spaces. In addition, on this map one must preliminarily spot some “interesting places” toward which the group is moving—and the map must also simply *be*, it must exist and come equipped with some of the most basic and fundamental features: the scale, the division into rectangles, the elements of landscape (tradition), and so forth. Besides tradition, which sets the foundation for this premapping, there is also the matter of the system-building introduction of new concepts—which likewise has

sufficient inertia to keep the “running mechanisms” (the travelers) moving by themselves, mechanically, so that at some point something interesting can emerge. Mechanical inertia now turns into inspiration. That is to say that, this map must show the distinctive contours of the aesthetic *system* (or even *systems*); the group’s *aesthetic ideology* must be drawn so the group can continue to exist. Since the groups KD and MG have been active for quite a long time, it may be said that their “celestial” maps are already well marked, (judging by the number of terms introduced by Pepperstein and myself). But everything has its reasonable limits. “Appendix 2” includes terms by other authors. In the section entitled “Additional Dictionaries” there takes place a certain deciphering of the principal terms from the main list. The terms by S. Anufriev and P. Pepperstein were actually included in the “Additional Dictionaries” in order to extend such notions of MG as “individual psychedelic practices,” and so forth. These are the “interesting places” on MG’s aesthetic map. For my part, I included here terms related to the “theory” of demonstration/exposition semiotic fields—these are, so to speak, the technical details or the partitioning into squares of KD’s aesthetic map—and to the schizoanalytical texts. It is noteworthy that the purely technical impetus that initially conditioned me to create the section “Additional Dictionaries” out of “sheer necessity” turned out to be a fruitful idea, as this part became an independent genre within the main dictionary. Y. Leiderman, who initially contributed with a concise list of terms for the main section of the dictionary, later composed his own “Additional Dictionary,” which is likewise compelling, possessing as it does all the features of a poetic-philosophical work—compositional integrity of words and their definitions, and an interrelationship among constituent elements.

We have been talking about the “journeys” of two groups—KD and MG. However, we should not forget that the basic content of the dictionary constitutes the discourse of the Moscow conceptualist school. The latter also has its big map, in the construction of which all the authors of this dictionary took part. And on that level, how many terms each author has contributed is immaterial. After all, perhaps the presence (or absence) of a single term, which at first glance may even seem unimportant, has accounted for the very existence of the entire aesthetic map of Moscow conceptualism for almost thirty years. Unfortunately, for various (mostly technical) reasons, this dictionary was elaborated without the participation of Erik Bulatov, Oleg Vasiliev, Vsevolod Nekrasov, Rimma and Valery

Gerlovin, and Nikita Alexeev—artists and poets without whom it would be difficult to imagine Moscow Conceptualism.

A. MONASTYRSKY,
December 28, 1998

DICTIONARY OF MOSCOW CONCEPTUALISM

(Main Section)

Note: The concepts from the Main Section of the *Dictionary of Moscow Conceptualism* translated in this Appendix are arranged following the Cyrillic alphabet, in accordance with the original Russian text

A

ABBREVIATIONEITY (Abbreviational reading, Abbreviational vision)

[*abbreviaturnoe prochtenie, abbreviaturnoe zrenie*] – an attitude toward the visual as toward a text that consists of abbreviations. The abbreviational perception of the world is conditioned by the existence of unconscious abbreviational structures in the depth of memory and language. (V. Tupitsyn, *Moscow Communal Conceptualism*, 1996. See also V. Tupitsyn, *Kommunal'nyi (post)modernsim: russkoe iskusstvo vtoroi poloviny XX veka*. Moscow: Ad. Marginem, 1998)

ABSOLUTE PAINTING [*absolyutnaia kartina*] – *Mona Lisa*, *Sistine Madonna*, *The Death of Marat*, *The Parable of the Blind* by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Dürer's *Melancholia*—all of these are absolute paintings. An absolute painting is that painting which, with maximal fullness and expressiveness, accumulates within itself the collective conscious and unconscious. It is also possible to say that the absolute painting not only accumulates but also forms the collective conscious and unconscious. These are paintings without which it is impossible to imagine the history of art. The overall number of these paintings—compared with the ocean of art—is relatively small, about fifty. This is only on the scale of European culture. It is possible, however, to locate absolute paintings within the temple-dome of individual national cultures, and these “regional” domes do not always overlap with the European ones. For example, the Russian list of absolute paintings must include, without fail, *Ivan the Terrible And His Son Ivan* (Ilya Repin, 1885) and the *The Bath of the Red Horse* (Kuzma Petrov-Vodkine, 1912)—paintings not part of the main (European) culture. (V. Pivovarov. “*Dachnaia tetrad' iz tsikla “Serye tetrad'i*”

AUTHOR [*avtor*] – the capitalized word “Author” conveyed, in the rhetoric of the PROGRAM OF WORKS, the pseudonym of the physical author Lev Rubinstein. (Compare to Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid's collective pseudonym “Famous artists of the 1970s of the 20th century.”) The term “Author” also partially parodied the idea of the romantic author-demiurge. It was an important break between the existence of the *Author* and the radically authorless style of the texts in the PROGRAM. (L. Rubinstein, *Raboty*, 1975)

AGENT [*agent*] – refers to a particular sense of abandonment and alienation from reality, a state of mind in which the individual has the impression that he is the *Agent* of something he does not comprehend, as if he had parachuted somewhere with no particular task to perform and with no knowledge whatsoever of under what agency he acts. The *Agent's* state of mind is not functional: he is alienated to the same degree from everything (“for the Agent all the stairs are slippery”). It is supposed that it is the euphoric opposite of paranoia. (Term by S. Anufriev [1989], clarified by P. Pepperstein)

AGENT (AND AGENCY) OF DYSTOPIA [*agency (i agenstva) distopii*] – semantic and visual turns (*returneli*) that both violate the one-directional character of utopian representation and destructure [*destruktiviruischie*] the space of utopian anticipation. (M. Tupitsyn. “Playing the Games of Difference” in *Artistas Rusos Contemporaneos*, Sala de Exposiciones, Santiago de Compostela, 1991)

THE AGGRESSION OF THE SOFT [*agressia myagkogo*] – marks the inevitable dependency of the speaker on what seems to be fortuitously produced speech; the impossibility of occupying a completely external position. The emptiness is continuously filled with soft residues from speech acts that were once produced, and which are not directed toward the Other, but into EMPTINESS. The “Aggression of the Soft” is the name of the performance by the group Frame (*Rama*), which took place on February 19, 1989, in the presence of eleven spectators. During this performance sound recordings of Mikhail Ryklin and Andrei Monastyrsky's voices were superimposed. (M. Ryklin, A. Al'ciuk, *RAMA. Performansy*, Moscow: Obskuri Viri, 1994)

ALIA [*alia*] – an intelligible state of things, the return to which generates realia. (S. Anufriev's term [1989], clarified by P. Pepperstein)

ANALYTICAL TREE [*analiticheskoe drevo*] – potentially, an endless process of self-generation of art objects by means of consecutive fragmentation. (I. Chuikov. *Analytical Tree* [Stammbaum der Analyse], 1994)

ANTIGRAVITATIONAL MEASURES (AGM) [*antigravitatsionnye meropriatia*] – the plot of a “gradual” (not “instant”) expansion of the universe, manifested in various forms that alter each other. (For example, “after the plants the AGM was conducted by the insects.”). (S. Anufriev, *Na sklone gory*, 1993)

APT-ART (from the English words “apartment” and “Art”) – the name of Nikita Alexeev's gallery, whose name later came to represent a direction in Moscow conceptualism. (The term emerged in 1982 in a discussion between M. Roshal, N. Alexeev, and S. Gundlakh.)

ARTIFICATION (*Artification caprice, artification distortion*) [*artifikatsia, artifikatsonnyi kapriz, artifikatsonnoe iskazhenie*] – a statement (articulation) that looks like a “work of art.” (P. Pepperstein. *Ideologizatsia neizvestnogo*, 1998)

ATTRIBUTES (*atributy*) – a class of conceptual object-gifts offered within the circle of NOMA and that were constructed in terms of schizoanalytical relations with regard to the “Hierarchy of the Monk Sergii.” (Introduced by A. Monastyrsky, 1992–94)

Б

BACKSTEIN FUNCTION [*Backstein funktsiya*] – universal operator of actuality within the circle of Moscow conceptualists during the nineties. (M. Ryklin, “Dva golubea” in *Iskusstvo kak prepiatsvie*, Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1997, c. 150)

BALLARAT (Principle) – lateral, selective, and literal illustration of certain secondary versions, of certain false ideas that phantasmatically emerge in the process of reading some texts (especially texts written in the detective or similar genres). The BALLARAT Principle operates as if by fixing marginal, optional, short-time mental adhesives (*slipania*), conferring upon them a real and even a foundational (*osnovopologayushchiy*) status by means of this illustrative procedure. The name is related to an episode from a story by Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Boscombe Valley Mystery.” (Y. Leiderman. *Ballaret i Konashevici*, 1989; M.G. *Taina BoskomsКОЙ doliny – Inspektzia “Meditsinskaia Germenevtika,” Ideotekhnika i rekreatsia*, Moscow: Obscuri Viri, 1994)

BRN and BRN (Big Rotten Novel and Big Relational Narration) [*BGR i BSP: bol'shoi gniloι roman i bol'shoe svyaznoe povestvovanie*] – refers to two types of hypernarratives: the literary and the historical. The first is regarded as dominant with respect to RUSSIA and the second with respect to the WEST. (MG, *Zona inkriminatsii*. Text-triada “Po povodu Bol'shogo Gnιlogo Romana,” 1988. The term was introduced by P. Pepperstein)

WHITE CAT [*belaya koshka*] – refers to the possibility of slipping away, and at the same time to the refreshing impulse contained in the depth of this slipping away. Thanks to this, the WHITE CAT appears as a guarantor of hermeneutical intrigue, and works as a spring in the biographical sideshow. WHITE CAT is the “spring gasket in the ditriumphation machine (*mashina detriumfatsyi*)” (P. Pepperstein. *Passo i detriumfatsya*, 1985–1986. P. Pepperstein. *Belaya koshka*, 1988)

WHITENESS OF THE PAPER OR OF THE PAINTING [*beloe bumagi ili kartiny*] – refers to an ambiguous meaning that depends entirely on the orientation, or the “accommodation,” of the viewer’s consciousness: to regard this “whiteness” simply as nothing, as *emptiness*, as an uncovered surface that awaits text or a drawing, or as a screen, on whose surface—from an infinite depth—a bright “positive” light comes toward the viewer, shining from a mysterious source. (I. Kabakov, *Rassuzhdenie o 3-x sloiakh* . . . MANI N1, 1981. A-Ya N6, 1984)

BIS-PUSTOTNIKI [*bis pustotniki*] – the term refers to those artists who attain minimal content by means of a paradoxical forcing of narrative allusions. To this category belong such artists as Konstantin Zvezdochetov, Perzy, and Vadim Zakharov. (Y. Leiderman together with M. Skripkin, V. Kojevnikov. *Svarschiki i bis-Pustotniki*, 1987)

BUKVARNOSTI [*bukvarnost'*] – one of the aesthetic categories of MG [Medgerminevtika] (related to the aesthetics of simplicity). The development of this category is demonstrated in Medgerminevtika’s book “*Lateks*.” (MG, Lateks, 1988)

FAKES (AND GRAPHOMANIA) [*butaphoria and graphomania*] – two poles of division in the genre of installation. FAKES (*butaphoria*) refers to the heap of accumulated objects (paintings, ready-mades, and other artifacts) that lacks coherence or any justification of its story. GRAPHOMANIA, on the other hand, refers to a homogenous background of various textual relations and interpretations, devoid of any objective supports but concerned instead only with continual self-reproduction within a chain of endless versifications. (Y. Leiderman, *Butaphoria i graphomania*. – *Nailuchshee i ochen' somnitel'noe*. Moskva, 1992)

B

WARUM-WARUM-like THINGS [*varum-varumnye dela*] – refers to a dependency on cause-and-effect relations, that is, on explanatory discourses. The term is derived from the German *warum* – “why.” (Y. Leiderman. *Polet, ukhod, ischeznoenie – Flug entfernung verschwinden. Konzeptuelle moskauer Kunst*, Gatz Verlag, 1995)

VIRTUAL [*virtual'nyi*] – as if existing. The “as if” is key here, a phrase that, by the way is widespread within discourse. See also virtual particles (physics), virtual reality, and so forth. (I. Chuikov, *Virtual sculpture*, 1977)

STUCKO [*vliparo*, from the Russian word *vlipat'* – to get stuck] – refers to immersion in a context. (*Ural'skii uglozub* [Uralian Cornertooth] is an identical combination of words for A. M. [Andrei Monastyrsky]) (V. Sorokin. *Rasskaz "Pamyatnik,"* 1983)

HEC (Highest Evaluation Category) [*VOK – vysshaya otsenochnaia kategoria*] – in the practice of MG [Medgerminevtika] an evaluation according to the HEC principle takes place spontaneously and cannot be interpreted rationally. It may be said that this evaluation demonstrates a refusal to evaluate and at the same time a realization of the impossibility of refusing. (MG, *Inspectional Block Notes*, 1988)

HACKING THE SETS [*vyrubanie garniturov*] – the process of revealing—on unfamiliar semantic territories—mechanisms that function simultaneously in such regimes as familiar (*svoi*), strange (*chyuzhoi*), and other (*drugoi*). (V. Zakharov, from the series of works from the early 1990s)

Г

GEISTPAARUNG (From *Geist + Paarung*) – spiritual pairing. Term by Elena Elagina, 1983. See Igor Makarevich *Kniga prodolzhenyi*, 1983)

DUMBBELL SCHEMA [*gantel'naia skhema*] – a demonstration element in the event, consisting of the event's organizers and its spectators. (A. Monastyrsky, foreword to Volume Two of *Journeys Outside the City*, 1983)

SET [*garnitur*] – refers to the semantic balance produced in a creative-temporal space that is both stylistically and ideologically precarious. A SET prevents some parts of this space from complete collapse. (Vadim Zakharov, From the series of work from the early 1990s)

ROTTEN BRIDO [*gniloe brido*] – the image of disintegrating matter, the entropy of the world. The term is derived from Vladimir Sorokin's story *Kiset* [Tobacco-Pouch], 1983.

ROTTEN PINOCCHIO [*gnilye buratino*] – refers to the population that inhabits the "worlds and spheres of impermanence." (Andrei Monastyrsky and Vladimir Sorokin. Hieromonk Sergii's foreword to the First Hierarchy, 1986)

ROTTEN SPOTS IN THE GOLDEN NIMBUS [*gnilye mesta zolotogo nimba*] – the aesthetic critique of the most sacred places of every ideology. (A. Monastyrsky, KD, Action “To Press on the Rotten Spots in the Golden Nimbus” in the 4th Volume of *Journeys Outside the City*, 1987)

ROTTEN TEXTS [*gnilye teksty*] – texts that cannot “dry out” in temporal space. (Vladimir Sorokin. From conversations held in the early 1980s)

SUPPURATION [*gnoinoe*] – state of metaphysical chaos. (Vladimir Sorokin, from texts and conversations held in the early 1980s)

EPISTEMOLOGICAL THIRST [*gnoseologicheskaya zhazhda*] – a paradoxical combination of words that connects the intellectual necessity of knowing to physiological processes. It refers to the Russian “collective unconscious,” which may be regarded as a single undivided “body” that desperately seeks to know itself, to perceive what it is “in itself.” (Ilya Kabakov, “Epistemological Thirst,” 1983 in Ilya Kabakov, *Das Leben Der Fliegen / The Life of Flies / Zhizn' Mukh* exh. cat. [Cologne: Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1992.])

GARGANTUA(ING) (GARGANTUA FIELD) [*gorgonal'nost' (gorgonal'noe pole)*] – refers to the “direct gaze,” which in turn leads to “direct action” – this is the main intention in Western culture. (Sergei Anufriev. *Pontogruev' bokovogo zrenie*, 1989)

GRAPHOMANY – see FAKES

GUGUȚĂ SYNDROME [*GuguȚă sindrom*] – Syndrome of complete lack of understanding (compare with TEDDY SYNDROME). GuguȚă is one of the characters of the Moldovan writer Ion Druta [*translator's note*: in fact the writer's name is Spiridon Vangheli]. GuguȚă represents the state of sudden and complete inability to comprehend something, as in this story for children where a boy's huge hat often covers his eyes, obstructing his vision of the world. Term by MG; see also TEDDY, 1988.

Д

DOUBLE AFTER [*dvoynoe posle*] – refers to the representation of unattractive scenes of city life in the work of post-Soviet photographers—of all of those whose “after” has expired with regard to the unattractive “before” that ended “after” the Revolution. (This first “after” is the most important rhetorical ingredient of Soviet photo production of the 1920s and 1930s) (M. Tupitsyn. “Photography as a Remedy for Stammering” in Boris Mikhailov *Unfinished Dissertation*, Zurich/New York: Scalo, 1998)

DEMONSTRATIVE SEMIOTIC FIELD [*demonstratsionnoe znakovoe pole*] – refers to a time-space continuum system of elements intentionally included by the authors in the construction of the text for a concrete work. The term is part of the correlative pair DEMONSTRATIVE SEMIOTIC FIELD – EXPOSITION SEMIOTIC FIELD. In the discourse of KD [Collective Actions group] the formation of the relation between the two fields is constructed around various elements of the event (part of the CATEGORIES KD) such as: walking, standing, lying in a pit, “people in the distance,” moving along a straight line, “imperceptibility,” light, sound, speech, group, and listening to listening. (A. Monastyrsky, foreword to the First Volume of *Journeys Outside the City*. See in particular KD’s action “Earth Works” [Zemlianye raboty], 1987)

DE-TRIUMPH-ACTION [*detriumfatsia*] – condition in which one or another thing frees itself from its existence in the state of being precisely that thing. It is as if the thing exits the state of its “triumph”; that is, the condition in which the thing occupies a determinate presence in the world. (P. Pepperstein. *Passo i detriumfatsia*, 1985–1986)

DISSIDENT MODERNISM [*dissidentskii modernism*] – denotes the unofficial art of the 1960s. (M. Tupitsyn. *Margins of Soviet Art: Socialist Realism to the present*. Milan: Politi, 1989)

DOUBLETS [*duplety*] – comical and downgraded myths produced by Sots artists as a negative completion of the official mythology. (M. Tupitsyn. “Sots art: The Russian De-constructive Force” in M. Tupitsyn, *Sots Art*, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986)

E

CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES [*Eliseiskie polea*] – a dynamic sociocultural space that can be located only by knowing its stylistic-mythological topography. (V. Zakharov., *Posledneia progulka po Eliseiskim poliam*. Cologne: Kunstvarein, 1995)

3

BUNNIES and HEDGEHOGS [*zaichiki i ezhiki*] – the highest ontological and “cultural” icons of children’s texts and illustrations. Like any icons, BUNNIES AND HEDGEHOGS are located beyond any transmutation, representing unperishable metacolumns within ontological vortexes. (V. Pivovarov, *Metampsihoz*, 1993)

WEST [*zapad*] – emerges in the role of the superego with regard to RUSSIA. Russian culture’s constant opposition to the WEST, as well as its attempt to live outside the Western cultural norm, may serve as a confirmation of this. (B. Groys, *Die Erfindung Russlands*. Munich: Hanser, 1993)

CONTAMINATION [*zarazhenie*] – refers to the process of dissolving formal-stylistic canons while keeping the meaning unaltered. (V. Zakharov. See the work of the group “Infekzionnaia”, 1989.)

PROBING (PROBE-WORK) [*zondirovanie (zond-raboty)*] – instrumental activity (work) that fulfills one of the AUTHOR’s tasks but that does not have a value of its own. (V. Zakharov, “Sloniki”, “Papuasy,” and others. See MANI N3 and 4, 1982)

И

IDEODELIKA [*ideodelika*] – “psychological” manipulations of ideas and ideological constructs, as well as the hallucinogenic or oneiromorphic layer that accounts for the composition of ideology. (P. Pepperstein. *Vvedenie v ideotekhniku*, 1989)

IDEOLOGICAL FACTURA [*ideologicheskaya faktura*] – refers to the effect of superimposing Soviet ideological clichés on purely formal, technological aspects of painting, color, or material—on all that concerns the tradition of easel painting. (M. Tupitsyn. “Sots Art: The Russian De-constructive Force,” in *Sots Art, The New Museum of Contemporary Art*, 1986)

IDEOTECHNIC [*ideotekhnika*] – registration and cataloging of technical devices employed in ideological production or ideological creation. (P. Pepperstein. *Vvedenie v ideotekhniku*, 1989)

THE HIERARCHY OF HIEROMONK SERGE [*ierarhia aeromonaha Sergia*] – system of hierarchies within the circle MANI-NOMA. Introduced by A. Monastyrsky and V. Sorokin (with the participation of S. Anufriev), with the word “Hieromonk” [*aeromonk*] introduced by Y. Kisin in 1986 (the first hierarchy: “The transfer of *obsosov* [see OBSOSIUM] of the MANI military department to the residency [fixed-post spy] position”).

ILLUST [*illiust*] – phantasm produced by various mechanisms of illustration. The Illust is a carrier of enjoyment (lust) whose generator may be considered the “libido of illustration” (the libido of arbitrary visualization). (P. Pepperstein. *Vvedenie v ideotekhniku*, 1989)

IMPERIAL CENTER [*imperskii tsentr*] – editorial authority in charge of elaboration of norms, materialization of speech, and objectification of language. (See MG, *Zona inkriminatsii*, 1988. Term by P. Pepperstein)

IM/PULSE TO HEAR [*im/pul's proslushivania*] – My addition to Rosalind Krauss's definition of visual modernism as “the im/pulse to see.” This addition emphasizes the fact that, in contrast to the Western art, Soviet (post-World War II) modernism gravitated toward phonocentrism. (M. Tupitsyn, “About Early Soviet Conceptualism,” in *Conceptualist Art: Points of Origin*. New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999)

INCITERS [*inspiratory*] – refers to objects (or processes) on the EXPOSITION SEMIOTIC FIELD that generate various motivational contexts for aesthetic activity. Most often this term refers to elements (or processes) found on construction (building), topographic, economic, and other sites that belong to the collective discourse. (A. Monastyrsky. *Zemlianye raboty*, 1987)

SIE [Space of Intellectual Evaluation [the spectators' consciousness]] [*IOP intellektual'no-otsenochnoe prostranstvo (soznanie zritel'ia)*] – on the demonstrative field of KD's actions, the time vector of the intellectual perception of the action (the pre-eventful, eventful, and posteventful parts). The spectator's attempt to rationally explain the event [i.e., KD's action]. (N. Panitkov. *O tipakh vospriyatia, vozmozhnykh na demonstratsionnom pole aktsii KD*, 1985)

IPS (Individual Psychedelic Space) [*IPP individualnoe psikhodelicheskoe prostranstvo*] – refers to a horizon of aspiration of the MG [Medgerminevtika] group, a horizon that is almost unattainable. Later IPS was described as attainable on multiple occasions and in multiple variants. (MG. *V poiskakh IPP*, 1988)

ART OF BACKGROUNDS [*iskusstvo fonov*] – refers to an artwork comprising the spectators' consciousness, both in terms of the aesthetic act and of this work's concrete existence. Most often these works focus on the notion of pause or consciously accentuate the pause, as for instance in the work of such artists as John Cage, Ilya Kabakov, and (KD). (A. Monastyrsky. “Ob iskusstve fonov,” 1982–83. Text from KD's action *Perevod* [Translation], 1985)

K

COPROMANCY [*kapromantiya*] – divination using feces. In the figurative sense, the opinion that “fate” is contained in “waste.” (P. Pepperstein. *Kapromantiya*, 1987)

CATEGORIES OF KD [*kategorii KD*] – a series of aesthetic methods and devices often used by the KD group to construct an event in terms of the “Demonstration of Demonstration” (e.g. walking, standing, lying in a pit, “people in the distance,” moving along a straight line, “imperceptibility,” light, sound, speech, group, repetitions, listening to listening). The CATEGORIES OF KD may also be autonomous; for instance, in the series of objects made by A. Monastyrsky for the action “*Discussion*.” [See text to KD’s action *Discussion*, 1985. See also A. Monastyrsky’s foreword to the 2nd volume of *Journeys Outside the City*, 1983.]

CDC Collective Discourse of Childhood [*KDD kollektivnyi diskurs detstva*] – childhood as a cultural niche that was serviced by various culture industries (e.g. children’s literature, book illustration, movies, TV shows for children, the production of toys, children’s magazines, design of playing fields, kindergartens, children’s shopping centers, and children’s food). (Term by P. Pepperstein, see MG, *Shubki bez shvov*, 1989)

KLAVA Club of the Avantgardists [*klub avangardistov*] – This term was introduced by S. Anufriev and S. Gundlakh in 1987. (KLAVA was the first officially registered artist association of Moscow artists. Translator’s note)

BOOK AFTER BOOK [*kniga za knigoi*] – Principle of text production and exhibition strategy developed in the practice of the Medgerminevtika group. This principle presupposes that information blocks (e.g., books, series of texts, and artworks) are not to be arranged in strict succession but must be divided by empty intervals that shall not exceed the size of the information block itself. The term was introduced by P. Pepperstein. [See MG, *Obiekt*. “Kniga za knigoi,” 1988. *Vtoraia vystavka KLAVY*]

COLLECTIVE BODIES [*kollektivnye tela*] – refers to bodies that secure their unity on the level of speech and are thus unable to be degraded into individual components. The dimension of the body is not sufficiently examined, whereas the dimension of speech is overdeveloped. The ideology of communism was possible only within a climate in which these kinds of bodies prevailed. [See M. Ryklin *Soznanie v rechevoi kul'ture*, 1988. See also the series of essays in “Terrorologika,” *Moskva-Tartu*, Eidos-Kul'tura, 1992]

KOLOBKOVOST' [*kolobkovost'*] – a mythological figure of “escape” in the aesthetic discourse of the Moscow Conceptual School. (I. Backstein, A. Monastyrsky. See introductory dialogue *Komnaty* to the Moscow Archive of New Art, MANI, 1986)

KOLOBOK [*kolobok*] – refers to a baked dough ball, a character in many Russian fairy tales. Kolobok rolls constantly on the road, running away from everyone who tries to eat it—e.g., the fox, the wolf, and the bear. Kolobok is a good image for someone who does not want to be identified, named, or regarded as attached to a particular role or to a particular place, of someone slipping away from all of this. (I. Kabakov, *NOMA*, Kunsthalle Hamburg, 1993)

COLUMBARIUM MACHINES [*kolumbarnye mashiny*] – objects, apparatuses, or installations called upon to stop the flow of interpretations and illustrations. The term shall be regarded as an alternative to “bachelor machines” (a term inspired by the French literary critic Michel Carrouges)—which are responsible, according to Deleuze, for the “production of consumption” and which offer to “hallucinations their object, and to delirium its content.” COLUMBARIUM MACHINES destroy any pregiven context (mainly by way of various temporal manipulations), returning it to the pure accidental quality of the text with its always missing author and inaccessible content. (See Y. Leiderman. *Kolumbarnye mashiny. Imena elektronov*. SPB, 1997)

COMMENTARIES [*komentarii*] – refers to the displacement of interest in the process of making an “object”—a novel, painting, or a poem—to reflection and creation of the discursive spheres around the object, to an interest in revealing the object’s context. The conviction conveyed by the term is that the act of “commenting” is much deeper, more interesting, and more “creative” than the object of the commentary. (I. Kabakov, *NOMA*, Kunsthalle Hamburg, 1993)

RESTING ROOM [*komnata otдыхa*] – expository space in which crystal clear concepts, styles, and author’s motivations turn into a complete dead end for the spectator. (S. Anufriev, V. Zakharov, *Tupik nashego vremeni*. Pastor Zond Edition, Kel’n, Moscow, 1997)

KONASHEVICH (Principle) – refers to the multiple and consistent application of the BALLARET principle, the circumflex practice that creates meta-illustratory surfaces, striating an Individual Psychedelic space. The principle was named after the prominent Soviet illustrator of children books V. Konashevich. (Y. Leiderman. “Ballaret i Konashevich,” 1989; MG “Taina Boskomskei doliny [Ballaret i Konashevich].” *Medgerminevtika, Ideotekhnika i rekreatsia*, Moscow: Obscuri Viri, 1994)

THE END OF GEOGRAPHY [*konets geografii*] – cause that has led to the contemporary perception of the “end of history,” since cultures hitherto unknown to each other have exhausted themselves. On the one hand, this explains the “end of progress” and the destruction of the idea of “humanity,” the reduction to worthlessness of such categories as “humanity” and “human history”; on the other hand, what now becomes clear is the apology for “personality” and “personal history” in contemporary society. (S. Gundlakh, *Konets geografii*, 1990)

CONCLUSIONS [*konkliuzii*] – a kind of engraved tablet, was in circulation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in religious seminaries in Western Ukraine in which complex symbolic and metaphoric imagery was accompanied by extensive textual insertions. These tablets were called “conclusions,” and they were used as theses that framed religious disputes within the seminaries. In the early 1970s, when the genre of album did not have yet a firmly established name [among the Moscow Conceptualists], “conclusions” was one of the “working” names for this genre. (V. Pivovarov, *Al'bom “Konkliuzii,”* 1975)

CONCEPTUAL ANIMALISM (Zoomorphic Discourse) [*kontseptual'nyi animalizm, zoomorfnyi diskurs*] – zoological semantic convention that appears within a conceptual work as an intermediary between “two texts,” functioning as both an INCITER and a concrete demonstrative utterance. (A. Monastyrsky. *Kontseptual'nyi animalizm*, 1989. A. Monastyrsky. *Fragment zoomorfного diskursa*, 1991; archive MANI “Reki, ozera, poleany” and “O rabotakh, sveazannykh s ‘Zoomorfnyim diskursom,’” 1996)

COMMUNAL UNCONSCIOUS [*kommunal'noe bessoznatel'noe*] – psychological phenomenon that provides an expanded scale of subjectivity and is determined by an extraordinary degree of stereotyping (not to be confused with Jung’s “collective unconscious”). (V. Tupitsyn. *Kommunal'nyi (post)modernizm*. Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1998)

COMMUNAL BODIES [*kommunal'nye tela*] – refers to collective bodies in their early stage of urbanization, when their aggression is intensified under the influence of unfavorable environmental conditions. The works of I. Kabakov, V. Pivovarov, V. Sorokin, and Medgerminevtika had a special importance for the emergence of this term, as did the discussions entertained between A. Monastyrsky and J. Backstein. (See M. Ryklin. *Terrorologiki*, Moscow: Eidos, 1992, pp. 11–70, 185–221)

COMMUNAL MODERNISM (CM) [*kommunal'nyi modernizm (KM)*] – set of aesthetic views and conventions, practiced by unofficial Soviet artists and writers from the end of the 1950s until the beginning of the 1970s. The communality of CM rests on these artists' and writers' association within various unofficial *Collective Bodies* [unions, associations, and groups]. Their participation was not compulsory (institutional) but rather voluntary or contractual. Therefore one can speak of a "contractual communality." Communal Postmodernism (CPM) emerged at the beginning of the 1970s, and from that moment on it developed in parallel with COMMUNAL MODERNISM. Moscow Communal Conceptualism is part of Communal Postmodernism. (V. Tupitsyn. *Kommunal'nyi (post)modernizm*. Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1998)

COSMONAUTS, TITANS, FIRE-BARS, RUNTS, AND GEORGIANS [*kosmonavty, titany, kolosniki, korotyshki, Gruziny*] – five "incorporeal ranks" of the Soviet collective conscious, which are represented in the sacred architectural and sculptural discourse of VDNKh [the Moscow Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy]. (See A. Monastyrsky. *VDNKh – stolitsa mira*, 1986)

CPS – Collective Psychedelic Space [*KPP kollektivnoe psychodelicheskoe prostranstvo*] – a grand reservoir of psychedelic effects, from which the "universal" [*vseobshchii*] draws its necessary material in accordance with the requirements imposed by the phantasms' conjunctures. In some cases CPS becomes visible from the platform of the IPS [see above: INDIVIDUAL PSYCHEDELIC SPACE], sometimes even making partial self-inventories by means of these platforms. Term by P. Pepperstein. (Medgerminevtika, *V poiskakh IPP*, 1989 and *Bokovoe prostranstvo sakral'nogo v SSSR*, 1991)

LOCAL-LORE-NESS [*kraevedenost'*] – figure of discourse that draws on the fact that during the late 1980s and early 1990s Moscow conceptualists were presented to the Western public in such a way that their displays resembled more traditional regional or ethnographical exhibitions (as might that of an exhibition entitled "Australian Aboriginal Artists") than important representatives of contemporary art. Introduced by Monastyrsky & Hänsen in 1992. (A. Monastyrsky, S. Hänsen, *Dva kulika*, 1992)

FASTENERS – (“connectedness,” “case-ness,” “shop-window-ness,” “shelf-ness”) [*KREPEZH*, “sviazanost’”, “fuliarnost’”, “vitrihost’”, “polochnost’”] – refers to works from which the discourse was “extracted,” works that contain “empty places of philosophizing” (in the style of “ETHICAL” CONCEPTUALISM). Artistic (plastic) objectivity of “technicisms” as a plan of content, which emerged in the aesthetics of late [Moscow] conceptualism by the mid-1980s (See for example, “Where are these white little men going?” by I. Kabakov, the notebook “And the Years Went By” [*Shli gody*] by Y. Leiderman, and the series of works with rope “windings” by A. Monastyrsky, such as “The Music of Consent” [*Muzyka soglasia*]). [A. Monastyrsky, J. Backstein. *TSO ili chernye dyry kontseptualizma* 1986, in the compilation *MANI N. 1 “Ding an Sich,”* 1986. A. M. *Zemlianye raboty*, 1987 [p. 542 of the *Journeys Outside the City*].)

PEASANTS IN THE CITY [*krestiane v grode*] – refers to those nomadic masses of peasants that flooded major Soviet cities during and after the forced mass collectivization of the 1930s. This process led to a radical transformation of these cities’ economic and cultural infrastructure. The terror was not simply directed against these masses (which is clear at the level of common sense). Besides the trauma of forced industrialization it also led to a huge destructive potential when these masses of peasants came to the cities lacking the necessary skills for inhabiting an urban environment. (The term was used in discussions between Ryklin and Monastyrsky during their collaboration in 1986–1987 on the unpublished manuscript “Russian Public Consciousness” [*Rossiiskoe obschestvennoe soznanie*]). The Institute of Philosophy 1984–1986)

THE CIRCLE OF PEOPLE WITH INTERESTS AT STAKE [*krug zainteresovannykh lits*] – This term is part of the PROGRAM OF WORKS; it was introduced in order to replace such words as “reader” and “public”—words that made so little sense in those early days and in those contexts [mid-1970s]. It was assumed that the PROGRAM’s basic ideas and artistic gestures had to be in use within this specific “Circle.” Besides, the more or less active participation of *the* CIRCLE OF PEOPLE WITH INTERESTS AT STAKE in the PROGRAM was the condition for its very existence. The role of the AUTHOR coincided in fact with the role of the initiator, of the instigator of an artistic action by *the* CIRCLE OF PEOPLE WITH INTERESTS AT STAKE. (L. Rubinstein. *Raboty*, 1975)

Л

LIVINGSTONE IN AFRICA [*Livingston v Afrike*] – refers to Moscow conceptualists' cultural self-determination and to their attitude toward the world. The term originated in A. Monastyrsky's conversations with J. Backstein. (See A. Monastyrsky's foreword to MANI archive entitled *Komnaty* [rooms], 1986)

SKIER [*lyzhnik*] – one of two central discursive figures in “sliding without Cheating,” the second figure being KOLOBOK. (S. Anufriev. *Na sklone gory*, 1993)

М

MANI – Moscow Archive of New Art. This term was introduced by Monastyrsky (with the participation of L. Rubinstein and N. Alexeev) at the end of the 1970s in order to denote that circle of Moscow conceptualists who were active from the second half of the 1970s and were to be so until the end of the 1980s—that is, until the emergence of the term NOMA. (A. Monastyrsky, *Pervaia papka MANI*, 1981)

MENTAL POP-ART [*mental'nyi pop-art*] – Just as Andy Warhol aestheticized and raised to the status of fine art banal and profane things, a number of completely idiotic and trivial ideas were introduced in the field of serious philosophy. (S. Gundlakh. *Personazhnyi avtor*, 1984)

FLICKERING [*mertsatel'nosti*] – a strategy established in recent years according to which the artist keeps away [*otstoianie*] from texts, gestures, and behaviors, which presupposes a temporary “entanglement in” [*vlipanie*] language, gestures, and behaviors but only for such an amount of time that it becomes impossible for the artist to be completely identified with them—and then “flying away” [*otletanie*] from them into the metapoint of the stratageme and not “getting entangled” in them again for quite a long time, so as not to become completely identified with them. Flickering refers to all of this. Finding oneself in a zone between this point and the language, gesture, or behavior constitutes a means of artistic manifestation called Flickering. (D.A. Prigov, introduction to one of the [MANI] collections [*sbornik*] made in the early 1980s)

METABOLA [*metabola*] – type of metaphor (in “postmodernist” poetics) that is given *a priori* the status of “excrement,” the status of “vital waste” (which requires the development of special drain for this “toxic” refuse). (Medgerminevtika. Text “Metabolika” in *Latex*, 1988)

METAPHORICAL BODY [*metaforicheskoe telo*] – body that constantly turns into phantasm. This is a type of waste generated during the production and use of metaphors. P. Pepperstein. “The Metaphorical body of Ulianovs,” 1988. [P. Pepperstein. *Seksopatologia metaforicheskikh tel*, 1988]

METRODISCOURSE (*metrodiskurs*) – a set of speech practices related to the construction of the Moscow subway, which was conceived by the Party as “the best in the world” and without precedent in terms of comfort and saturation with artistic artifacts. [See M. Ryklin, “Luchshii v mire: diskurs moskovskogo metro”; Russian version in Wiener Slavischer Almanach, 1995; and German version in Lettre Internationale 1995. See also M. Ryklin, *Metrodiskurs*, 1996]

MOKSHA [*moksha*] – refers to the MOSCOW CONCEPTUAL SCHOOL. The third phase of development of Moscow Conceptualism (after MANI and NOMA). This term was introduced by Monastyrsky in 1993 during the viewing and interpretation of the motion picture *Dead Alive*. [See letter of A. Monastyrsky to S. Hänsen from October 28, 1993]

MONGOL WINDOW [*Mongol'skoe okoshko*] – heraldical stereotype of a wreath-window, used in the coat of arms of all socialist countries. One of the optical-instrumental figures (gadgets) in hallucinations (*galliutsinoz*). Term by P. Pepperstein. [Medgerminevtika, *Bokovoe prostranstvo sakral'nogo v SSSR*, 1991]

MOSCOW COMMUNAL CONCEPTUALISM [*Moskovskii kommunal'nyi kontseptualizm*] – community of Moscow alternative artists who created textual objects and descriptive languages (*iazyki opisania*), as well as working in the genre of performance. For many of them communal and authoritarian speech practices were the object of conscious or unconscious reflection. Term by V. Tupitsyn. [V. Tupitsyn. *Kommunal'nyi (post)modernizm*. Moscow: Ad. Marginem, 1998]

MOSCOW CONCEPTUALISM – “romantic, dreaming, and psychologizing version of the international conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s.” [B. Groys, *Moscow Romantic Conceptualism* in *A-Ya*, no. 1, 1979]

MUSEOLOGICAL UNCONSCIOUS [*muzeologicheskoe bessoznatel'noe*] – that unconscious which sees the survival instinct of the individual transposed from his or her physical body to the result of his or her activities and achievements in such fields as culture and science. Accordingly, the museological function follows the formula “I am legacy.” [V. Tupitsyn. *Muzeologicheskoe bessoznatel'noe*. Parachut, 1998]

H

CIRCUMCISION [*narezanie*] – refers to the principle of working with text used in the artistic practice of Medgerminevtika, according to which a discourse, on one or another topic, is assembled from citations extracted from books taken at random from a bookcase and opened likewise at random. (See P. Pepperstein. “The Metaphorical Body of the Ulianovs,” 1988)

THE FAILURE TO CARRY THE JAR [*nedonos banki*] – method of terminating a process at its very climax. The termination of the form-shaping [*formoobrazovanie*] process at the time of its inception. (V. Zakharov, *Fama & Fortune Bulletin*, 1991 [7] Vienna)

FAILURE TO STICK [*nezalipanie*] – equivocal attitude to your own “I, to your place in this world, and to your occupation, which is best described as a kind of “flickering” (*mertsanie*): you end up alternating between the state of being sometimes inside all of this [*“I, your place, your occupation*], and sometimes outside. This “flickering” takes place continuously, following the same rhythm—sometimes you preserve your “identity” and sometimes you lose it; sometimes you merge with your profession or occupation and sometimes at one instant you lose all of this. (See I. Kabakov, *NOMA*, Kunsthalle Hamburg, 1993)

UNNOTICED-NESS [*nezametnost*] – one of the CATEGORIES OF KD. Inscribed in the meaning of the category *Unnoticed-ness* is an aesthetic device that presupposes the existence, in the common time-space zone, of an event in the general eventfulness of the action (often the most important one), of a certain “here and now” located beyond the boundaries of the spectators’ interest and attention. In the meaning of “Expositional Unnoticed-ness,” for instance, lies a working element of the creative and representative mechanism that is also hidden from the author at the early stages of the work, but which nevertheless influences the construction of the work (e.g., the case with the box under the chandelier that served A. M. [Andrei Monastyrsky] in producing the work “Cannon” (1975), a work based on the relations between lighting and audio impressions). In its initial meaning, the term “Unnoticed-ness” was developed in collaboration with N. Panitkov. (See *Journeys Outside the City* p. 408, as well as A. Monastyrsky’s text *TSI-TSI*, 1985 [published in the *Journeys*])

THE UNKNOWN [*neizvestnoe*] – central category in medical-hermeneutical discourse [the work of Medgerminevtika]. The term refers to “that which lies beyond the surface (of painting, etc.), and which is impossible to identify in terms of the available or of the impossible, and whose agencies are the act of assuming or the slip of the tongue—which as a matter of fact are variants of one and the same thing” (S. Anufriev and S. Volkov, 1989). The formula of the unknown: “We know for sure what we do not know; do we know the unknown or don’t we.” (P. Pepperstein, *Ideologia neizvestnogo*, 1988)

NEO-PSEUDO-ART [*neolzheiskusstvo*] – refers to an agreement to call all contemporary art “Pseudo-art”; an agreement formed in the days of youth, when such a definition of contemporary art was popularized by the mainstream Soviet literature of the 1960s and 1970s. The addition of the suffix “neo-” suggests that the author believes himself also to be working in the tradition of pseudo-art: “My entire life I dreamed of making only Real art, but somehow every time I end up making only contemporary art.” (Y. Albert, Cycle of works of *Elite-Democratic Art* [*Elitarno-demokraticeskoe iskusstvo*] 1987)

NEITHER TO THE MIND NOR TO THE HEART [*ni umu ni serdtsu*] – Term by S. Anufriev, who did not present a definition. (This was the title of one phase in the first exhibition organized by KLAFA, 1987)

THE NEW SINCERETY [*novaia iskrennost'*] – within the boundaries of the totally established conventionality of languages, the art of primarily resorting to traditionally instituted lyrico-confessional discourses: this is what may be called The New Sincerity. (D. A. Prigov, from the preface to the text “Novaia iskrennost',” 1984)

NOMA – introduced by Pavel Pepperstein to refer to the circle of Moscow conceptualism; it replaced the term “circle MANI” at the end of the 1980s. NOMA refers to “a group of people who describe the boundaries of the self [*opisyvaiut svoi kraia*] by means of a set of linguistic practices that they have developed together.” The term was formed from the word “nome,” used in ancient Egypt to refer to the divided parts of Osiris. The noma was also a territorial unit in ancient Egypt. According to legend, one part of Osiris was buried in each noma. (See P. Pepperstein, *The Idealization of the Unknown*, lecture delivered at the MGU (Moscow State University) seminar “New Languages in Art,” January 1988)

O

OBSOSIUM [*obsosium*] – phenomenon in epistemological package. Andrei Monastyrsky's version of this term is "Obsosy." The term was used by Vladimir Sorokin in discussions and in some of his texts the 1980s.

WINDOWS [*okna*] – constructions imitating real windows that are in fact hybrids of windows, and pictures that pretend to reveal the essence of painting. "Painting is the window on the world"—Alberti. (Ivan Chuikov, works starting with the painting *Window # 1*, 1967)

OMS [*omy*] – refers to transmutational monads of a certain metallicity that are capable of being verbalized, textualized, and embodied in images. OMS are easily woven into various semantic ornaments, such as texts, pictures, and photographs. The OMS belonging to certain individuals can often form relations or "bundles" with the OMS of other persons, animals, or things, leading to the formation of double, triple, or multiple (collective) OMS. One example of such a collective Oms is the NOMA. (V. Pivovarov, *Metampsikhoz*, 1993)

ONANIUM [*onanium*] – aesthetic autoeroticism. (V. Sorokin. The Object "Onanium," 1988)

ORTHODOX HUT [*ortodoxal'naya izbushka*] – the (honorary) title conferred upon the EMPTY CANON of MG [Medgerminevtika]. (P. Pepperstein. Letter to S. Anufiev from Prague, February 18, 1988.)

OPEN PAINTING [*otkrytaia kartina*] – If a classical painting, which on the whole has preserved its particularities throughout the modernist epoch, represents a closed space, a self-sufficient immanent "world in itself," then the open conceptual painting is loose and unfastened. It is unfastened first of all in the direction of the spectator. This open conceptual painting seems eternally unfinished, perpetually in the process of its making, and it acquires meaning only during the contact and the dialogue with the spectator. Secondly, this painting is open in the direction of other paintings or artistic objects; that is, it is absolutely contextual and may be "read" or interpreted only in relation to other paintings-texts. (V. Pivovarov. *Razbitoe zerkalo*, 1977)

THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA OR FROM DUCHAMP TO DUCHAMP [*otkrytie Ameriki ili ot Dushana k Dushanu*] – refers to the method of a second discovery of America, or to the discovery of something that has already been known. This method presupposes nothing new or innovative, nothing original. (V. Zakharov. *Poslednyaya progulka po Eliseiskim poliam*. Collogne Kunstverei, Cantz Ostfildern, 1995)

П

PANORAMAS [*panoramy*] – objects formed by reversing conventional panoramas in such a way that the internal becomes external and vice versa. In this case the observer is not inside the panorama but outside it, thus bringing the separation between the subject and the object to the absurd. (See I. Chuikov's *Panoramas I, II, III, IV, V*, 1976, and the 1993 installation *Panorama* in Santiago-de-Compostela.)

JOURNEYS OUTSIDE THE CITY (JOC) [*poezdki za gorod (PZG)*] – a genre of action (and the title of KD's books) in which an emphasis is placed on the aesthetic significance of different phases of journeying to the place where the event [action] takes place, as well as on various forms of reporting and describing the event. It is also the general plot of all of KD's JOC (including the sixth volume made by A. Monastyrsky and S. Hänsen independently of KD). The term was introduced by Monastyrsky and Kabakov in 1979. (A. Monastyrsky, preface to the 3rd volume of the *Journeys*, 1985. A. Monastyrsky, *KD and "Journeys Outside the City,"* 1992. See also general comments in Monastyrsky, *Poezdki za gorod: kollektivnye deistvia*. Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1998)

ON THE EDGE [*po kraiu*] – refers to the inner sense of self as leaving or escaping one's own "center," as if living on the edge of life, on the margin of culture, on the verge of every kind of professional activity. The conviction that everything that is important in life takes place on the "edges," in marginal zones, on the borders of everyday life and culture. (I. Kabakov, *NOMA*, Hamburger Kunsthalle; Cantz, 1993)

THE GESTURE OF PRESUMPTION, THE GESTURE OF DEFENSE, THE FAREWELL GESTURE [*polagaiuschii zhest, zhest zaschity, proshal'nyi zhest*] – "art historical" categories. THE GESTURE OF PRESUMPTION is the act of "creation"; that is, the gesture by which the author (as part of his "God-imitating" posture) creates new "worlds." THE GESTURE OF DEFENSE is the gesture that helps the "creator" [author] to distance himself from the created "worlds" in that moment when these "worlds" begin to threaten his existence. THE FAREWELL GESTURE is the gesture addressed to those "worlds" that begin to lose their actuality. (See P. Pepperstein, "The Idealization of the Unknown," lecture delivered during the MGU [Moscow State University] seminar "New Languages in Art," January 1988)

POLITICAL TALE [*politicheskaya skazka*] – refers to imagery that incorporates both traditional [Russian] folkloric iconography and the visual arsenal of Soviet mythology. (M. Tupitsyn, "And Who Are You?" in *Leonid Sokov*. Zeus/Trabia: New York, 1986)

ZONE OF IMPERCEPTIBILITY [*polosa nerazlichenia*] – part of the DEMONSTRATIVE SEMIOTIC FIELD (often bordering the EXPOSITION SEMIOTIC FIELD) where certain aural and visual objects of the action cannot be recognized by the spectator as belonging to the action. (See A. Monastyrsky's short explanation of KD's action "Place of Action" and Appendix No. 4 to the same action, 1979. On the meaning of ZONE OF IMPERCEPTIBILITY see also A. Monastyrsky, *O structure aktsii 'Obsuzhdenie 2'* in the *Journeys*)

PANTAGRUEL OF PERIPHERAL VISION [*Pantagruel' bokovogo zrenia*] – refers to the frontier zone located in between the Known and the Unknown; a "zone of incrimination" that constantly makes greater claims (based on "bluffing" [*pont*], or on "showing off" [*vzeat' na pont*]). (S. Anufriev, *Pantagruel' bokovogo zrenia*, 1989)

PORNO-ANGELISM [*pornoangelizm*] – the insecurities of the recently urbanized collective bodies when they are faced with the developed practices of cultural consumption of the American or European types; the inevitable process of deformation of these practices of consumption when they reach the new contexts, up to that point where these cultures became in some instances practically unrecognizable. (M. Ryklin, "Metamorfozy rechegogo zrenia," in *Terrorologia*, pp. 83–96).

PORNOLOGY, also **Pornological Shift**, **Pornological Border**, **Pornological Funnel** [*PORNOLOGIA, pornologicheskii shift, pornologicheskaja granitsa, pornologicheskaja voronka*] – PORNOLOGY is the "orgiastic" state of speech (in the orthodox tradition sometimes called "prodigal cursing" [*bludnye brani*]). Pornological Shift is the gradual "slippage" of speech (text) into the state of "cursing." The Pornological Border is that invisible border within the text after which all norms of what constitutes "permitted" or "literary" language are abolished. (One can encounter the Pornological Border in NOMA's texts, especially in the prose of V. Sorokin). The Pornological Funnel is the final "breakdown" of text that is often accompanied by a total collapse of speech, which may be regarded in itself as a certain aesthetic trick. (P. Pepperstein, *Pornologia prodolzhenii*, 1993)

OBJECT-FRAME [*predmet-rama*] – plastic ("artistic," stylistic) material of the event, "within" which the event is constituted as "EMPTY ACTION," often as a "washing up of objectified transcendentality." One of the CATEGORIES OF KD. See A. Monastyrsky, foreword to volume 3 of *Journeys Outside the City*, 1985, pp. 420–425. See also his text "Tzi-Tzi")

GIVEN ART [*predostavitel'noe iskusstvo*] – refers to a kind of fine art in which the spectator—by means of a complex figurative plot embedded in the structure of the work—is given the opportunity to individually interpret the work of art. Term introduced by S. Anufriev in the early 1980s. (Definition developed by I. Chuikov)

PROGRAM OF WORKS [*programma rabot*] – the AUTHOR [Lev Rubenstein] announced the beginning of the implementation of the PROGRAM OF WORKS in 1975. It was assumed that all the subsequent artistic gestures of the AUTHOR would be included and drawn into the announced PROGRAM OF WORKS. This is what obviously happened, despite the fact that later the AUTHOR stopped using this term. In fact, the term “Program of Works” meant at that time [1975] what later became designated by the widely used term “project.” The deliberately impersonal, “antipoetic” pathos of this term [PROGRAM OF WORKS] corresponded to the tendency, prevalent in those days, to formalize (up to the level of bureaucratization) the entire so-called “creative process.” (L. Rubinstein, *Raboty*, 1975)

PROJECT¹ – Unlike other language-based practices and [our] identification with them (including also the performance-behavioral text) [the term “project”] presupposes the dominance of the temporal component and of processes that unfold along a temporal axis (presupposing a limit: a project as long as life); when different kinds of textual signs serve only as marks that determine the trajectory, or the vectors, of projective existence, and also of artistic-aesthetic existence in a phantomatic way. (The term became part of the working vocabulary of D. Prigov, who introduced it, in the mid-1990s)

SPACE OF JUBILIATION [*prostranstvo likovania*] – subway, recreation parks, palaces of culture, specially decorated halls, where various rites of jubilation and rejoicing take place, striking and thrilling many travelers (for instance André Gide in 1936). Hidden behind the ecstatic optimism obligatory for this kind of space is a profound depression; in fact these are disguised funeral rites, whose objective at the time cannot yet be named. (M. Ryklin, “Back to Moscow, sans the USSR” in *Jacques Derrida v Moskve. Dekonstruksia puteshestvia*, M., RIK Kul'tura, 1993, 108–27)

¹ The term PROJECT is not part of the main section of the *Dictionary of Moscow Conceptualism*, which this Appendix translates. In the source text the word is part of an additional section that includes terms introduced by the poet Dmitry Prigov. Given the importance that this term plays in my examination of the post-1989 *Journeys* I have decided to include it here. [The author].

PSYCHEDELIC (COUNTER)REVOLUTION – [*psichodelicheskaja kontr-revoliutsia*] – programmatic orientation toward the preventional occultation (domestication) of psychedelic space. The term also denotes a concrete historical period (“in-between coups”; that is, the period that lasted between the coup of 1991 and that of 1993), when the political (counter-)revolution was superimposed on the psychedelic (counter-) revolution. (Term by P. Pepperstein. See Medgerminevtika, *Ideotekhnika i rekreatsia*, 1989)

PSYCHEDELIC HETEROGENESIS [*psichodelicheskii geterogenez*] – refers to the production of the other by borrowing the plasticity, the “physical” resources of the text (e.g., literary, artistic, musical). (V. Tupitsyn, *Drugoe iskusstvo*. Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1997.)

PSYCHO-TROPE [*psikho-trop*] – figure of inner speech that regulates the relations between various “psychema” [*psikhema*]; that is, between forms filled with psychic content. (P. Pepperstein, *Iz laboratornykh zapisei*, 1992)

EMPTY [*pustoe*] – primordial belief in the ambivalence and reversibility of the concept “Empty,” which denotes both absolute “nothingness” and absolute “fullness.” “Empty” is not a temporal or a spatial gap (pause) but an infinite field of intensities that potentially contains all the richness of various meanings and significances. (I. Kabakov, *NOMA*, Kunsthalle Hamburg, 1993)

EMPTY ACTION [*pustoe deistvie*] – refers to the outside-of-the-demonstration (*vnedemonstratsionnyi*) element of the text. (Often in KD’s actions this outside-of-the-demonstration time of the event [action] constitutes—for the spectators—the dramatic center of the action). [See A. Monastyrsky, *Commentaries*, July 7, 1978. See also A. Monastyrsky, foreword to Volume One of the *Journeys Outside the City*, 1980]

EMPTINESS [*pustota*] – an extraordinarily active “negative” space directed entirely toward everyday reality, which it constantly seeks to “swallow,” sucking and feeding on its energy. (Ilya Kabakov “O Pustote” in Kabakov, *Das Leben Der Fliegen / The Life of Flies / Zhizn’ Mukh* exh. cat. [Collogne: Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1992]).

EMPTY CANON [*pustotnyi kanon*] – term used by MG [Medgerminevtika group] to describe the entire body of texts written by the group, including the most important texts of NOMA [i.e., of Moscow Conceptualism]. Later EMPTY CANON, and namely Medgerminevtika’s part of the CANON, was called “Empty Canon ‘Orthodox Hut’” (*Pustotnyi kanon “Ortodoksal’naia izbushka”*). (P. Pepperstein, Letter to S. Anufiev from Prague, February 18, 1988)

THE PATH OF CONCENTRATION OF INATTENTION [*put' kontsentratsii nevnimania*] – the psychic capacity to maintain independence in conditions when you become aware of the multitude of conflicting doctrines. (S. Gundlakh, *Pro okul'tistov i dekadentov*, 1991.)

P

RELYARS, Editorial Lyarvs [*relyary, redaktsionnye lyarvy*] – characters who “curate” one or another periodical publication; e.g., *Punch* in the magazine *Punch*, *Crocodile* in *Crocodile* [*Krokodil*], and *Murzilka* in the magazine *Murzilka*. (P. Pepperstein. *Tri zhurnala*, 1989)

SPEECH (PAN-SPEECH) CULTURE (SPEECH SIGHT) [*rechevaia (panrechevaia) kul'tura (rechevoe zrenie)*] – refers to a culture in which the relation between expression and content is fundamentally broken because speech practices tend to overlap completely with possible actions or deeds. The bodies of a SPEECH CULTURE are irresponsible (*nevmenaemy*) on the level of action (in the plane of content) not because of their perversity, but because the speech originally constitutes the living environment of the action. (The concept of Speech Culture was developed in 1984 by M. Ryklin in his analysis of texts by M. Bakhtin and other Russian authors. This theory is presented in such articles as “Consciousness in Speech Culture” [*Soznanie v rechevoi kul'ture*], 1988)

RPP [*RPP*] – Recreational-Psychedelic-Practice of Medgerminevtika (also known as Recreational-Psychedelic-Pause) [*rekreatsionno-psikhodelicheskaya pauza*]. (Medgerminevtika. *Ideotekhnika i rekreatsia*, 1989)

RUSSIA – region in which a series of unconscious, destructive aspects of Western civilization are revealed (see also WEST). The term is derived from the title of Boris Groys's text “Russia as the Unconscious of the West” (*Rossia kak podsoznanie Zapada*). See B. Groys, *Utopia i obmen* (Moscow: Znak, 1993), translated into English as *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992)

C

SACRALIZERS [*sakralizatory*] – special protective devices used to safeguard the “inside” from the “outside.” SACRALIZERS may be the most ordinary household objects. Wearing SACRALIZERS—for instance, by hanging a pan on the nose and shoe brushes on the ears—it is possible to appear in the most “polluted” public and spiritual spaces, remaining protected from hazardous and invisible [spiritual] contamination. (Term by V. Pivovarov. See the album *Sakralizatory*, 1979)

SEMANTIA, (SEMANTIC CHEESE) [*semantia, (semanticheskii syr)*] – torrent of significances that contains gaps and cavities. (Term by S. Anufriev, 1989. The definition was provided by P. Pepperstein)

SYSTEM OF FALSE SARCOPHAGI [*sistema lozhnykh sarkofagov*] – method of producing textual, installational, ideological, and other traps, leading the spectator away from the meaning embedded in the foundation of the work. (Term by V. Zakharov. *Fama & Fortune Bulletin, Berlin* [7], Vienna.)

SLIDING WITHOUT CHEATING [*skol'zhenie bez obmana*] – Term introduced by S. Anufriev, who declined to provide a definition.

GLORY [*slava*] – total clarification and (at the same time spontaneous) absolute orderliness. (Term by MG [Medgerminevtika]. See the text “Slava” in *Latex*, 1988)

DICTIONARITY [*slovarnost'*] – results from a semantic shift that takes place in relation to the concept of “orality” [*slovesnost'*]. (Term by P. Pepperstein. [Medgerminevtika, *Slovarnost'*, 1988])

COAUTHORSHIP [*soavtorstvo*] – refers to the method of expanding the author’s territory through the exploration of foreign in-between-authors-zones by means of joint efforts. This eventually leads to the total extinction of the author’s territory. The method of COAUTHORSHIP was first explored in between 1980 and 1982 by Skersis and Zakharov, who engaged in collaborations with such Moscow artists as the Mukhomor group [Toadstools], the KD group, Zhigalov & Abalakova, and Alexeev. In 1983 COAUTHORSHIP as a method was adopted by Zakharov together with N. Stolpovskaia. Together they established three types of COAUTHORSHIP: parallel, consecutive, and assumptive. Zakharov’s COAUTHORSHIP activities, which lasted from 1977 to 1998, have been related to the following names: I. Lutz, V. Skersis, N. Stolpovskaia, S. Anufriev, MG, Y. Albert, I. Chuikov, A. Gonopolisky, and I. Sokolov. (V. Zakharov. See his works in the MANI Archive, nos. 3 and 4)

CONTEMPORARY ARTIST [*sovremenyi khudozhnik*] – curator of somebody else's bad art. The term was derived from Boris Groys's article *Khudozhnik kak kurator chiuzhogo plokhogo iskusstva* (Artist as Curator of Somebody Else's Bad Art) in *Utopia i obmen*, Moscow: Znak, 1993.

SOTS-ART – form of postmodernism that resorts to various Soviet ideologemes—e.g., political, social. The term was introduced by V. Komar & A. Melamid in 1972. SOTS-ART as a movement was theorized and instituted by M. Tupitsyn in her articles “Sots art: russkii psevdogeroicheski stil” (“Sots-Art: the Russian Pseudo-Heroic Style,” 1984) and “Sots-art: russkoe dekonstruktivnoe usilie” (“Sots-Art: the Russian Deconstructivist Effort”; The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986)

SOCIALIST REALISM – late avant-garde trend in Russian art of the 1930–40s that combined the method of appropriation from various artistic traditions of the past with twentieth-century avant-garde strategies, based on the constant astonishment of the spectator. Its leading representative was Josef Stalin. See Boris Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin: die gespaltene Kultur in der Sowjetunion* (Munich: C. Hanser, 1988)

SOTSMODERNISM [*sotsmodernizm*] – socialist modernism of the 1920s and 1930s, which coexisted with SOCIALIST REALISM but, unlike the latter, was capable of generating a style. Examples of SOTSMODERNISM include the architecture of the first line of the Moscow subway, book and magazine design, photography and photomontage, and the decoration of exhibition pavilions and workers' clubs. What makes SOTSMODERNISM different from the traditional avant-garde is its canceling or removing (*sniatie*) of the negation. Therefore SOTSMODERNISM can be considered an affirmative avant-garde. (V. Tupitsyn, *Drugoe iskusstvo*. Moscow; Ad Marginem, 1997.)

TRANQUIL COUNTING OF NONEXISTENT OBJECTS (TCNO) [*spokoinyi podschet nesuschestvuishchikh predmetov (SPNP)*] – nonfunctional practice that continues the apophatic direction of KD despite the engaged social reality of the late 1990s, despite the BAKSTEIN FUNCTION and all other functions. (Yuri Leiderman, *Dima Bulychev*, 1996. Yuri Leiderman, *Spokoinyi podschet nesuschestvuishchikh predmetov*, 1998)

STALIN – leading Soviet avant-garde artist of the 1930s and 1940s—a convinced suprematist in the fields of both art and politics. During his time he also appeared as a star of mass culture (*geroi massovoi kul'tury*). Stalin anticipated many strategies of postmodernism; see for instance SOCIALIST REALISM. (See Boris Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin: die gespaltene Kultur in der Sowjetunion*, Munich: C. Hanser, 1988.)

SOUVENIR [*suvenir*] – type of object that preserves in itself the memory of a certain event (objectified memory). (Medgerminevtika. *Trofei, Suvenir, Atribut*, 1994)

T

TEDDY SYNDROME – Syndrome of immediate (phantasmal) understanding. The term was proposed by Monastyrsky in the mid-1980s and widely used in the texts of the Medgerminevtika group. The syndrome was derived from the story “Teddy,” by the American writer J. D. Salinger. (Medgerminevtika Dialogue, “Teddy,” 1988)

TEXTURBATION (SPEECHOLOGY) [*texturbatsya (recelozhstvo)*] – the ecstasy of speaking; the distinct role that various speech acts play in Russian culture. V. Tupitsyn in a series of 1990s discussions with Kabakov. (V. Tupitsyn, *Razgovor s I. Kabakovym*, 1990. *Arts*, 1991)

BODY OF TERROR [*telo terrora*] – simultaneous victims and agents of a certain type of Terror that destroys bodies in order to preserve the eidetic fullness of orthodox speech, which perceives this destruction as something completely positive. (See M. Ryklin. “Bodies of Terror,” 1990)

CORPORAL OPTICS [*telesnaya optika*] – carnal, belittling vision, as well as the ability to look at the world (and oneself within it) with the “eyes” of the communal body. When equipped with CORPORAL OPTICS, the individual acquires the skills of group vision. (V. Tupitsyn, *Drugoe iskusstvo*. Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1997)

NAMELESS BODY [*telo-bez-imeni*] – refers to an alternative artistic environment that, in order to survive, has refused to name or define its sociocultural identity. (V. Tupitsyn, *Drugoe iskusstvo*. Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1997)

THEORY OF REFLECTION [*teoria otrazhenia*] – The term, which seems to draw parodically on the Marxist-Leninist theory of art, actually suggests the relativity and the conventionality of all means of representation. (See I. Chuikov’s works “Theory of reflection I, II, IV,” starting with 1992)

COMMODITY PANEL OF SIGNS [*tovarnaia panel' znakov*] – level of visual representation, a kind of firing ground for signs, where one can establish their psychoeconomic value. (P. Pepperstein, *Belaia koshka*, 1988)

TOTAL INSTALLATION – an installation constructed in such a way as to include the spectator within it—so designed to take into account the spectator's reaction inside a closed, "windowless" space that often consists of several rooms. Of the most decisive importance for the TOTAL INSTALLATION is the atmosphere, the aura; this is attained by painting the walls, through lighting effects, through the configuration of the rooms, and so forth. In the meantime the "usual" components of the installation—objects, drawings, paintings, texts—become ordinary components of the whole. (See I. Kabakov, *On the "Total" Installation*. Ostfildern, Germany: Cantz, 1995, 243–260)

TOT-ART – total art in a total situation. The term was introduced by Natalya Abalakova and Anatoly Zhigalov in 1983 (to replace the name of the group "Total Artistic Action"). Tot-Art is the realization of Abalakova and Zhigalov's project "Investigating the essence of art in relation to life and art," which was based on the method of criticizing art by means of art itself.

CRACKED MATRYOSHKA [*tresnutaya matreshka*] – demonstration principle (in a discourse) in which a number of internal objects belonging to a particular discourse are demonstrated without exteriorization, by means of a specially prepared demonstration section ("fissure" or "crack"). (See P. Pepperstein, *Belaia koshka*, 1988)

TROPHY [*trofei*] – object brought to the surface from the depths of hallucinosis. (P. Pepperstein, *Fontan-gora*. 1993)

DEADLOCK AS GENRE [*tupik kak zhanr*] – This term was introduced by S. Anufriev and V. Zakharov in 1997, when the two worked on a book and exhibition project entitled "The Deadlock of Our Time. Deadlock as Genre" [*Tupik nashego vremeni. Tupik kak zhanr*]. (See S. Anufriev, V. Zakharov, *Tupik nashego vremeni*, Pastor Zond Edition, Cologne-Moscow, 1997)

y

RETENTION IN UNBRINGING [*uderzhanie v nedonose*] – the constant interruption of the process of constructing the fields of inferiority, powerlessness, apathy, unattainability, and incompleteness. (V. Zakharov. *Fama & Fortune Bulletin* [7], Vienna)

RETENTION OF THE WORK IN THE PRESENT (THE COMPLEMENT METHOD)

[*uderzhanie raboty v nastoeaschem (metod dopolnenia)*] – the preservation of the original meaning of an arbitrarily selected work, despite changes that take place in its context due to the extension in time of its commentary, which may be expressed in the open form of text, object, drawing, photography, and so forth; this does not exclude the occasional remaking of the work itself. (V. Zakharov, Catalogue Kunstverein Freiburg, 1989)

RETENTION OF THE WORK IN THE PAST (THE METHOD OF WHITENING)

[*uderzhanie raboty v proshlom (metod otbelivania)*] – refers to the process of continuous erasure of meaning, occurring during alterations within the contextual-temporal continuum. (V. Zakharov. *Pobelka Peti in volka na territorii garnitura "Madam Zhlyuz."* Catalogue gallery Walcheturm Zurich, 1991)

UM – UM (YM – YM) – the opposite of the term “zaum,” this refers to texts (mostly poetic) of the Moscow conceptual school. (Hirt Wonders, “Together with texts about texts next to the texts. A revision of the theory of culture of Moscow Conceptualism,” 1991).

U-TOPOS (UTOPOS) – place that does not have its own place—a place without place. Term by S. Anufriev, 1989. (The definition was offered by P. Pepperstein)

Φ

FAKES [*imitatsii* [imitations]] – used to name a series of works [by I. Chuikov], this term equates painting, as a form of high art, with craft [*alfreinyi rabotami*], suggesting that the application of signs on the surface of the canvas is the essence of the practice of painting. (See I. Chuikov’s series “Fakes” [*Imitatsia*], 1989)

FACTOGRAPHICAL DISCOURSE [*faktographicheskii diskurs*] – system of documentation used to construct various metalevels of the artistic event in terms of resultative contexts of the aesthetic action. (A. Monastyrsky, foreword to the second volume of *Journeys Outside the City*, 1983)

FACTOGRAPHY-AS-AFFIRMATION [*faktografiia-kak-affirmatsia*] – a positive and uncritical recording of events, as for example in the work of “factists” [*faktoviki*] (N. Chiuzhak and others, “October”, “ROPF,” and other associations and groups active during the 1920s and 1930s) Factography-as-resistance [or negation] consists in documenting those facts that diverge from the official version, leading to the destabilization of affirmative culture. (V. Tupitsyn, *Kommunal'nyi (post) modernizm*. Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1998)

PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE [*filosofskaia praktika*] – the ritual part of philosophy. A type of occupation or quasi-ritual that confers upon philosophy a practical component. The term helped the circle MANI to identify itself, and is indeed considered this circle's greatest discovery. (S. Gundlakh, from texts of the late 1970s)

PHOTOCREATION [*fotokreatsia*] – the creation of light, including also the “lightening of meaning.” (S. Anufriev, *Fotokreatsia*, 1996)

FRAGMENTS [*fragmenty*] – isolated and enlarged pieces or conglomerations of pieces containing various representations with no hierarchy among them. Fragmentation in this context refers to the selection and the comparison of the most diverse stylistic components in order to demonstrate the conventionality of representation. (I. Chuikov, 1982)

FUNCTIONING IN CULTURE [*funktsionirovanie v kul'ture*] – activity influencing the already established cultural-semantic space in all of its points by such means as: probing (*zondirovanie*), amplification, simulation, substitution, overtaking (*operezhenie*), deterrence, and stagnation. The term emerged in 1979 in the coauthored works of Zakharov and Lutz. It was developed by the SZ group, 1980–84 (in the reenactment of KD's action “Liblich” during the exhibition “Apt-art in Nature” and other exhibitions). It was also occasionally employed by V. Zakharov and S. Anufriev in 1986 in the process of considering the methods of “tossing” [*podbrasyvanie*] ideas and total repetitions. (V. Zakharov, *MANI 1*, 1981)

X

HACK-WORK (THE ART OF ELITE BOTCHERS) [*khaltura, iskusstvo elitarnykh khalturschikov*] – term applied to the art produced on Furmanov and Chistye [Prudy] streets from 1986 to 1990. (S. Anufriev, V. Zakharov, *Tupik nashego vremeni*, in Pastor Zond Edition, Cologne–Moscow, 1997)

ARTISTIC INSANITY [*khudozhestvennoe nevmeniaemosti*] – behavior of artists who reflect neither upon a specific cultural-historical context nor upon the succession of dominant cultural-aesthetic mainstreams, to the point that [these mainstreams] affirm themselves within a particular culture, turning into artistic genres [*promysly*]. (D. Prigov, foreword to a collection of texts from the early 1980s)

ARTIST-CHARACTER [*khudozhnik personazh*] – intermediary figure between artist and spectator. The term was introduced by Sven Gundlach. (See his text “Character Author” [*personazhnyi avtor*] in the literature issue of *A-Ya*, 1985.) The concept of ARTIST-CHARACTER was further developed by Kabakov. (See “Artist Character” [*khudozhnik personazh*], 1985) In addition, the expansion of the discursive score [*partitura*] of the “character” had two more phases: in 1988, in a dialogue between Kabakov and Monastyrsky entitled “Spectator-character” [*zritel’-personazh*] (see MANI # 4, “*Materialy dlia publikatsii*”), Kabakov introduced the term “Spectator-character” [*zritel’-personazh*]; and in 1989, in a dialogue between Backstein and Monastyrsky for the journal *Iskusstvo*, Monastraysky introduced the terms “critic-character” [*kritik-personazh*] and “ideologue-character” [*ideolog-karakter*].

HOMO COMMUNALIS – person who went through the communal school of life (for instance, lived in a communal apartment) or was educated in the spirit of the communal tradition. (V. Tupitsyn, *Kommunal’nyi (post)modernizm*. Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1998)

HOMO LIGNUM – rigidity, stiffness of the consciousness. (I. Makarevich, Series of works from 1996–1999)

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SHAGREEN EFFECT – method of maintaining a cultural paradigm in its most minimal condition by minimal means and a minimal quantity of people. (V. Zakharov, *Pastor*, n. 2, 1992)

SCHIZOANALYSIS – Deleuze and Guattari's term from *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* . . . where they criticize psychoanalysis as a repressive, family-oriented, and neurosis-generating practice. [...] This, as well as other terms from *Anti-Oedipus* ("desiring machines," "bodies without organs"), have been reconsidered and recontextualized by the Moscow conceptualists. The term was introduced in the circle of Moscow Conceptualism by M. Ryklin, who in 1987 made an abridged translation of *Anti Oedipus*. (Moscow: INION, 1990)

SCHIZO-ILLUSTRATION [*shizoillustrirovaniye*] – one of the main artistic principles of Medgerminevtika: the division between "direct illustration" and "illustration of the illustration." (Medgerminevtika, *Ideotekhnika i rekreatsia*. Moscow: Obskuri Viri, 1994)

SCHIZO-CHINA (or the Schizophrenic China) – refers to an acoustic effect of a "centuries-long tradition" employed by NOMA members, who used the schizophrenic "extension of consciousness"—an aptitude that members of this circle possess. (P. Pepperstein, letter to S. Anufiev from Prague, February 18, 1988)

LOCK-BUILDING [*shliuzovanie* from Russian *шлюз* –[lock] – a) a method of unconscious creation within the expository space of exit mechanisms that have not been anticipated by the author; b) a method of control of parallel processes by means of pulling them from one into another (in my case, my involvement in archiving, publishing, artistic, and collecting activities). (V. Zakharov, from the series of works from the early 1990s)

3

EXPOSITION SEMIOTIC FIELD [*ekspozitsionnoye znakovoye pole*] – system of elements from the time-space continuum that are not deliberately included by the authors in the construction of a concrete text [work], but that nevertheless influence it by means of their hidden motivational contexts. In the aesthetic practice of KD the "exposition semiotic field" may be activated as part of a correlated pair with the DEMONSTRATIVE SEMIOTIC FIELD by means of the discourse of EMPTY ACTION. (See also INCITERS.) (A. Monastyrsky, *Zemlianye raboty*, 1987)

EXPONEMA [*exponema*] – unit of the EXPOSITION SEMIOTIC FIELD correlated with the corresponding element in the paradigmatic series; that is, in the system of units of a certain discourse. (A. Monastyrsky, *Eksponomy kontseptualizma*, 1989)

ELEMENTARY POETRY [*elementarnaya poezia*] – term used to name a series of texts and objects produced by A. Monastyrsky between 1975 and 1983, and which is related to the development of KD's aesthetic discourse.

ES [*ES –emotsional'noe prostranstvo*] – emotional space (the spectator's consciousness). In the DEMONSTRATIVE FIELD of KD's actions the temporary vector of the emotional perception of the action (divided into the pre-eventful, eventful, and posteventful [dosobytiinoe, sobytiinoe, i poslesobytiinoe]). The degree of emotional involvement of the spectator in the action. (N. Panitkov, *O tipakh vospriiatia, vozmozhnykh na demonstratsionnom pole aktsii KD*, 1985)

AESTHETICS OF REAL ACTION [*estetika real'nogo deistvia*] – term proposed to serve as a methodological foundation for non-mimetic action art, in contrast with the traditional dramatic arts and most of the happenings. (S. Romashko, *Estetika real'nogo deistvia*, 1980, in the *Journeys*, p. 109)

ESTONIA – name of a circle that replaced NOMA [Moscow Conceptualism] to some extent. The circle ESTONIA consisted of such groups as MG [Medgerminevtika], MG Inspection Board, The Sky Commission, Fenzo, SSV, The Fourth Height, Russia, Tartu, Piarnu, KZS, and Disco. The circle was formed after the second, 1993 coup. [See also PSYCHEDELIC (COUNTER)REVOLUTION.] (P. Pepperstein, *Krug Tartu i krug Estonia*, 1998)

"ETHICAL" CONCEPTUALISM (*"eticheskii" kontseptualizm*) – the tactical emphasis in conceptual art practice on the "relationship of preservation" [*otnosheniia sokhranosti*] and "technicisms" [*tekhnitsizmy*], and on the preference to work with the opposition "man versus reality" instead of "man versus culture" as employed by the new aesthetic nomads. ("Ethical" [English "etic"] must be understood as referring to the "non emic" [English "emic"] in the meaning of the "structural units of language"; i.e., that which does not have semiological relevance [in linguistics, that which relates to the physical properties of linguistic material].) A. Monastyrsky, I. Backstein, *TSO ili chiornye dyry kontseptualizma* – 1986, in MANI # 1, "Ding an Sich", 1986. See also A. Monastyrsky, *Zamechanie of eticheskikh granizakh khudozhestvennogo proizvedeniia*, 1988.

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CLARITY AND PEACE [*iasnost' i pokoi*] – Term by S. Anufriev, who did not present a definition.

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INDEX

- a* instead of *b* principle, the, 54
- Abalakova, Natalya, 141
- Abstract Expressionism, 70
- accomplished waiting. *See* Collective Actions group: Theory of Waiting.
- action as empty action, 9, 30, 73, 78, 94, 100–102, 116–117, 122, 124, 132, 142, 158–159, 161–162, 167, 169, 206, 264, 276; as group meditations, 26; happening, 5, 25, 35, 82–83, 237–238, 241, 286n18; performance, 5, 25–26, 29, 35–36, 68, 198, 101, 103, 114, 118, 140, 145, 150, 164, 169, 190–191, 214, 237–238, 281, 286n18; as praxis. *See also* Arendt, Hannah, 162, 251, 283; as production, 25, 121, 145, 171, 215, 246; as staging, 25, 145, 246, 281; as thing (*vesch'*), 25, 145; as work (*rabota*), 25, 145
- Adorno, Theodor, 257, 264, 285
- aesthetic function. *See also* social function; Eimermacher, Karl, 28
- aesthetics of administration. *See also* Buchloh, Benjamin H. D., 168
- aesthetic of emptiness. *See also* emptiness, 83
- Age of Commerce, 183
- Age of Enlightenment, 182–183
- Akunin, Boris, 250
- Albert, Yuri, 38n49, 99, 119, 222
- Alberti, Leon Battista, 85
- Alexeev, Nikita, 4, 23, 24, 25n16, 31, 36n42, 61, 90n5, 93, 102, 110, 118–119, 209n25, 214n39, 215, 221, 229n70, 268, 270, 294
- alienation. *See also* objectivation; objectification; reification, 81, 218, 280–282, 284, 286n18
- Allilueva, Svetlana, 149
- alternative art. *See also* dissident art; nonconformist art; underground art; unofficial art; unengaged art; unhang-able art; behind-the-dresser art, 26n18, 58
- American Neo-Dada, 151
- Andre, Stefan, 156
- Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. *See also* Deleuze, Gilles; Guattari, Felix, 205
- Anufriev, Sergei, 46n67, 293
- Arcades Project*. *See also* Benjamin, Walter, 8
- Arendt, Hannah, 162, 164–165, 167–168, 281n8
- Aristotle, 187
- Art & Language (group), 35, 52, 119
- “art of long stories perceived slowly” and “art of short stories perceived quickly.” *See also* Albert, Yuri, 99
- Art informel*, 69–70
- Arte povera*, 50n4
- Artists Unions. *See also* Creative Unions, 188, 193–195
- artist-ideologue, 41
- “association” (*sodruzhestvo*). *See also* collaboration, 216, 218
- Athenian *polis*, 167

- Austin, John, 66–67, 160
- author's song (*avtorskaya pesnya*), 1
- Avant, pendant et après, esquisses historiques*. *See also* before/during/after, 8
- A-Ya (magazine), 6n5, 25, 27n21, 28, 43n63, 49–50, 75, 145, 217, 288n20
- azioni collettive*, 24–25
- Backstein, Josef, 31, 39n50, 41, 42, 45, 92n7, 94–95, 130–131, 126–127, 214, 234n76, 268, 285n16, 288n20
- "Bartleby the Scrivener" (short story by Herman Melville), 152
- Bataille, Georges, 46–47
- becoming white (*stanovlenie belym*), 76
- before/during/after, 8
- Begriffsgeschichte*, 17–18
- "behind the dresser" art (*zashkafnoe iskusstvo*). *See also* alternative art, 65
- Being and Nothingness*. *See also* Sartre, Jean-Paul, 84n85, 250
- Beliutin (group), 27
- Benda, Václav, 6n8, 168
- Benjamin, Walter, 8, 173
- Berdyaev, Nikolai, 208n20
- Berlin, Isaiah, 71n58
- Beuys, Joseph, 271
- Bignamini, Ilaria, 24n10–11, 30, 35
- Black Square*. *See also* Malevich, Kazimir, 43, 84–85, 140, 173n2
- Bloch, Ernst, 257
- Bobrinskaia, Ekaterina, 6n7, 19n4, 35–37, 39n50, 43, 55n17, 63n41, 69n54, 166n138, 171n147, 225n62, 284n12
- Borges, Jorge Luis, 277
- Boston Institute of Contemporary Art, the, 40
- Braque, Georges, 237
- Brener, Alexander, 38, 210
- Breton, André, 45–46, 62
- Brezhnev, Leonid, 65–66, 69, 144, 262, 269
- Buchloh, Benjamin H. D., 130n69, 169–170
- budetlianin*. *See also* Khlebnikov, Velimir, 61
- Bulatov, Erik, 40n53, 69, 76, 144, 149, 231, 293
- Bulgakov, Sergei, 70
- Bulldozer Exhibition, the, 65, 68, 216
- CADA (*Colectivo de Acciones de Arte*), 150
- Cage, John, 29, 35, 82, 116, 124, 140, 264–265
- Carothers, Thomas, 177n7
- Champions of the World (group), 212, 229
- Ch'an Buddhism, 80–85
- Charter 77, 6n8, 168
- Chekhov, Anton, 54, 106
- Chilean Avanzada, 150
- China, 11, 80, 206, 222
- Christian Orthodox theories, 52
- Christian symbolism, 76

- Chuiikov, Ivan, 31, 38n49, 40n53, 69, 110n44, 119, 156
- CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), 50
- circle noma. *See* NOMA
- coefficient of creativity (*See also* Duchamp, Marcel), 223–224
- Collective Actions group (*gruppa Kollektivnye deistvia*; KD), 2, 6n7, 19n4, 20, 23n9, 43n64, 49, 225n62, 272, 284n12, 292; action spectators, 271; aesthetics of emptiness, 3, 74, 78, 80, 82; aloofness (*obosoblennosti*), 151; anonymous spectator (*anonimnyi-zritel'*), 9, 90–91, 153–154, 169, 232–234, 246, 258n126, 271; *Appearance* [action], 92–94, 96n16, 97, 100–105, 109, 112, 114, 116, 121, 132, 166–167, 215, 265, 273–274; *Archeology of Light* [action], 222, 272, 284n13; Backstein Function, the, 94–96, 126, 156; *Bag* [action], 262; *Banners* [series], 90; *Banner-99* (Canadian) [action] (*See also* Canadian Banner), 258; bracketed collectivity, 213; *Canadian Banner* [action], 260; Categories KD, 131n70, 132; chance, 22, 29, 89, 258n126, 265; “classical KD.” *See also* “compact period,” 5, 204; “collective” actionist poetry, 37, 166; *Comedy* [action], 230; “corpse (oral) planting” (*trupnoe ozelenenie*), 22; Cosmonauts, Titans, Fire-bars, Runts, and Georgians, 148; Demonstration of Demonstration, 131n70, 132n71; demonstrative semiotic field, 18, 94, 99; *Discussion* [action], 122–128, 131–132, 166; distinction between “phase” and “volume,” 136; domestic actions, 125, 133; empty action, 9, 30, 73, 78, 94, 100–102, 116–117, 132, 142, 158–159, 161–162, 167, 169, 206, 264, 276; ES (emotional space), 94, 99, 113, 132; eventful part of the action, 99, 267; exposition semiotic field, 18n3, 94, 101, 138, 158, 261, 293; factographical discourse (*faktograficheskii diskurs*), 9, 78, 108, 111, 112–113, 115–118, 118–122, 132, 135–136, 148, 158, 231, 264, 281–282, 286n18; fisherman (*rybak*), 157–158, 269n144; free spectators, 271, 274 *Garages* [action], 222, 269n145; gazing spectator (character), 271; Group-3 [action], 284; *Hangars Northwest* [action], 230, 238–23; Hsi-yu Chi, 231; imperceptibility, 110, 113, 131, 152–153, 234; inciters, 138, 148, 261; indefinability, 24, 29; indeterminacy, 151; Indexes KD, 215; installation, 12, 44, 58, 141, 150, 189, 190–191, 206, 210, 229–232, 234–243, 245–248, 254–255, 260, 266; institutionalization of unofficial art, 19; interested spectators, 271; invisible spectators, 271; *Journey Outside the City* [as aesthetic concept and artistic genre], 30, 94–95, 133–135, 264, 273; *Journeys Outside the City* [as publication], 2–3, 5, 89, 122, 137, 148, 172, 174, 203, 205 210n26, 212, 229n70, 239n80, 282, 286n18; “journeys” vs. “trips” [translation], 3; KD and [KD], 12, 200n3; Kievogorskoe Field (*Kievogorskoe pole*), 4, 12, 17, 19, 26, 86, 96, 98, 102, 109, 113, 116–117, 120–121, 125–136, 131, 133, 137, 147, 154, 174, 200, 222, 238–239, 255–256, 258, 260–262, 264, 266, 268–270, 273, 275, 283, 283–284; Kiev Gorky, 4, 17, 19, 96, 110, 124, 131, 147; Koldei, 23n9, 25; *Library* [action], 262–264; *Library 2007* [action], 262; list-of-authors, 212; “main artist-organizer,” 91; Nothing (*nich'tol*), 107; origin of name “Collection Actions.” *See also* *azioni collettive*, 24–25n15; out-of-the-photography-space (*vnefotograficheskoe prostranstvo*), 113; out-of-town-ness (*zagorodnost'*), 96, 108, 113, 121, 238, 267, 270; outsider spectators, 271; *Painting Two* [action], 155–157, 158n20; participant-organizer (*uchastnik ustroitel'*), 102; participants' reports, 12, 92, 158, 215, 255, 270, 274, 276; Peasants in the City [concept], 148, 275n161; percentages of authorship, 11, 214; periodization after-1989, 201, 203; *Pipe* [action], 275; *Places # 40 and 41* [action], 222; private aesthetic historicism vs. social historicism, 149; Program of Works [concept], 245, 246–247; Queen Victoria Day, 259; *Red Numbers (for Yuri Albert)* [action], 222; rotten Pinocchio (*gnilye buratiny*), 22, 291; rotten places of the golden nimbus (*gnilye*

- mesta zolotogo nimba*, 22; *Russian World* (action), 125; schizoanalysis, 46n67, 206 221schizo-analytical places in Moscow and the Moscow Region, 11, 206; schizo-China, 11, 206; schizo-illustration, 11, 206; Sorokin's spectators, 271; spectator outsider, 91; spectator-participant, 9, 36, 90–92, 94, 96, 89–99, 101–102, 107, 109–110, 114, 116, 122, 125, 127, 132, 147, 154, 157–158, 162, 165–166, 168, 222, 224, 234, 246, 255, 270–274, 276; statistics, 220, 223–224, 226–227; *Stop* (action), 284; Syndrome Guguță. *See also* Teddy Syndrome. 81, 274; *Ten Appearances* (action), 107, 109–110, 112, 114–116, 120, 135, 137, 147, 166; Theory of Waiting, 97, 129; Teddy Syndrome. *See also* Guguță Syndrome, 81, 274; *Tent* (action), 262; totalitarian space of KD, 138; undetermined Zones, 94, 97; uninterestedness (*neinterestnost'*), 107, 125; Voices (action), 149; waiting as a frame. *See also* Nekrasov, Vsevolod, 95; Western spectators, 271; Williams Institute of Fodder, 12, 239, 261; zone of imperceptibility, 110, 113, 152–153, 234; 14:07-15:13 (action), 222; 51 (*Archeology of light-2*) (action), 222; 83 (action), 222; 625-520 (action), 222, 264, 284n13, 288n23, 625-520 in *Berlin* (action), 222
- collaboration (*sotrudnicestvo*). *See also* association. 145, 189, 216–218, 220
- collective farm (*kolkhoz*), 12, 26, 215
- closed society. *See also* Popper, Karl, 193
- Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), 10
- Communal Modernism. *See also* Tupitsyn, Viktor, 40n53, 57, 64
- Communal Postmodernism. *See also* Tupitsyn, Viktor, 57, 64
- conceptual history; conceptual historiography. *See also* *Begriffsgeschichte*, 17, 18n2
- conceptual art history, 18
- Condorcet, Marquis de, 182–183
- constative utterance. *See also* Austin, John, 67, 160
- Constructivism, 228
- contemporary art, 9–11, 21, 33–35, 38n46, 40, 43, 48, 49–50, 52, 55, 143–144, 158–159, 174, 185–196, 202–203, 211, 226, 230, 232, 241, 243, 248, 260, 272–274, 277, 287, 288–289
- contemporary Russian art, 5, 9, 29n28, 45, 50, 68n51, 288n20
- Contemporary Russian Art Center of America, 29n28, 52, 288n20
- Cooke, Lynn, 192
- Coomaraswamy, Ananda K., 264
- Corvalan, Luis, 150
- Creative Unions. *See also* Artists Unions. 188
- Cremona Foundation, 29n28, 50n7, 288n20
- Critical Dictionary*. *See also* Bataille, Georges, 46–47
- Critique of Judgment, The*. *See also* Kant, Immanuel, 164
- Crocodile* (magazine), 318
- Cubo-futurism, 41n57, 71, 73, 173
- cultural politics of the “three Ts,” 186
- culturescapes (*Kulturlandschaft*), 257
- Dada. *See also* Weimar Dada; Neo-Dada, 39, 151
- Dan, Calin, 198n34
- Dead Alive* (motion picture), 310
- Dead Souls*. *See also* Gogol, Nikolai, 55
- DeKooning, William, 240

- Deleuze, Gilles, 205, 277
- dematerialization of art, 60, 159
- demonstrative field. *See* Collective Actions group: demonstrative semiotic field, 9, 99–102, 112, 113n47, 124, 129, 131–132, 136, 145, 152–153, 157, 134
- developed socialism, 65
- Dewey, John, 252–253
- Dialectic of Enlightenment*. *See also* Adorno, Theodor; Horkheimer, Max, 257
- Dictionary of Moscow Conceptualism*, 7n9–10, 11, 45–46, 251, 277, 288
- Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme*. *See also* Breton, André; Éluard, Paul, 45, 46n66, 47
- dissident art, 50n7
- Documents*. *See also* Bataille, Georges, 46
- docu-montaging. *See also* Roberts, John, 171
- Dodge, Norton, 31, 40n54, 50n7
- Donskoy, Gennady, 98
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor, 56, 78
- Duchamp, Marcel, 35, 54, 143–144, 223–224
- dukhovka*. *See also* *netlenka*, 69n53,
- during and the terror of transition, 8, 9
- Dvizhenie (group), 27, 30
- Dyogot, Ekaterina, 58–60, 89
- Eastwood, Clint, 277
- Eimermacher, Karl, 27n22, 28,
- El Lissitzky, 85n87, 179n2
- Elagina, Elena, 107, 110, 156–157, 215, 221, 229n70, 230, 269
- Éluard, Paul, 45, 46n66
- emptiness (*pustota*). *See also* aesthetics of emptiness. XIV, 7, 20, 24, 30, 47, 49, 55, 73, 86, 98, 107; columbarium tablet. *See also* Leiderman, Yuri. 555; empty action, 9, 30, 73, 78, 94, 100–102, 116–117, 122, 124, 132, 146, 142, 158–159, 161–162, 167, 169, 206, 264, 276; empty canon, 73–74; empty eternity, 73, 277; empty photographs, 9, 73, 78, 113, 116; empty villa, 73; hidden emptiness, 22, 73; imperceptibility, 110, 113, 124, 131, 152–153, 234; named emptiness, 73; *shunyata* [or *sunyata*], 73, 109, 273, 277; unknown, the, 54, 73; unrecorded, the, 73; unseen, the, 73
- Engineerism, 228
- Eremina, M., 125
- Estonia, 57, 64, 242
- estrangement (*ostranenie*), 120, 169, 283
- Existentialism, 70
- exposition field. *See* Collective Actions group: exposition semiotic field, 9, 101–102, 113n47, 139, 153, 158n120, 206, 275
- external editorial position, 66
- Falkland Islands, 118
- First Gallery. *See also* Salakhova, Aidan. 202
- Fedorov, Nikolai, 70
- Flash Art* (magazine), 24, 29, 149
- Florensky, Pavel, 70
- Fluxus, 30, 35
- formless (*informe*), 46–47
- Freud, Sigmund, 52, 208

- Frieze* (magazine), 26n19
- "fruitful misunderstanding," 209
- Fukuyama, Francis, 201
- function of critique, prospective, 49
- Futurism, 61–62, 71n57, 73n60
- Galerie de France, 154
- Galleria Foksal, 188n31
- Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft*, 178, 180
- Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin*. *See also* Groys, Boris. 41
- Glasperlenspiel, Das* (novel by Hermann Hesse). 60
- Glory to the CPSU*. *See also* Bulatov, Erik. 144
- Gnedov, Vasilisk. *See also* *Poem of the End*. 75
- Gnezdo (group), 98
- Gogol, Nikolai, 54–55, 78–79, 106
- Gorbachev, Mikhail, 138, 180, 251
- Gorohovsky, Eduard, 221
- group (*gruppa*), significance of the term, 216
- Group 8 (group), 27n22
- Groys, Boris, 6–7, 13, 25, 27–30, 34n39, 41, 49–54, 63, 75, 78n67, 141, 145, 207–208, 210, 232, 288; and *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin*, 41; Moscow vs. Western conceptualism, 310; naming of "romantic" conceptualism, 5, 9; and Russia as the Unconscious of the West, 207; and Suitzidov, I., 51n10; and total enlightenment, 45, 141
- Gu, Wenda, 210
- Guelman Gallery, 202
- Gundlakh, Sven, 55, 118n55, 171
- Gutov, Dmitry, 60, 61n34
- Guten Tag* (magazine), 124
- Habermas, Jürgen, 183n25, 191
- Hänsgen, Sabine, 31n33, 36n42, 49n2, 138, 203–204, 211, 214n39, 215, 230, 234n76
- Hayek, Friedrich, 194
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 187, 194, 201, 265, 279–280, 282
- Helme, Sirje. *See also* repro-avant-garde. 209
- Hesse, Hermann. *See* *Glasperlenspiel, Das*. 60
- High Performance* (magazine), 286n18
- Holin, Igor, 106
- Hollywood, 179, 286n18
- Horkheimer, Max, 257, 264
- Hume, David, 183
- Hunger Artist, The* (short story by Franz Kafka), 152
- I Ching*, 221
- Inspection Medical Hermeneutics group, 37, 211
- installation art, 232, 234, 237, 240–241, 243
- Institute of Contemporary Art (Moscow), 288n20
- Institutionalization of performance art in the United States. *See also* Wheeler, Britta. 286
- International Contemporary Art Network (ICAN), 192
- International Monetary Fund. *See* IMF. 10, 185, 255

- Interpol* (exhibition), 210
- Izmailovo Park. See also Second Fall Open-Air Show of Painting; Soviet Woodstock. 70
- James, William, 251, 253
- journeying to the white, 76
- Kabakov, Ilya, album and empty action, 42, 76–78, 82–84, 140; *Album series*, 42, 76–78; *Decorator Maligin*, 84; fear of the center, 139; as “main spectator-participant,” 91; and *quid pro quo* principle. See *a* instead of *b* principle. 54; ready-made text, 142–144; Russian Conceptualism, 53–54, 77, 106; *Sitting-in-the-Closet-Primakov*, 85; *Ten Characters*, 76; and “Text,” 138; total installation, 141, 238; white, Empty, and light triad, 76
- Kagarlitsky, Boris, 211
- Kahnweiler, Daniel-Henry, 237
- Kafka, Franz. See *Hunger Artist, The*. 152, 277
- Kamenski, Alexandr, 249
- Kant, Immanuel, 164, 265
- Kaprow, Alan, 35, 82, 151n106, 240
- Kessler, Erwin, 190
- Khlebnikov, Velimir, 61, 71
- Khrushchev, Nikita, 65–66, 142, 269
- Khrushchev’s Thaw, 27
- Kierkegaard, Søren, 204
- Kievogorskoe Field (*Kievogorskoe pole*), 4, 12, 17, 19, 26, 84, 96, 98, 102, 109, 113, 116–117, 120–121, 125–126, 131, 133, 137, 146–147, 154, 156, 174, 200, 222, 238–239, 255–256, 258, 260–264, 266, 268–270, 273, 275, 283–284
- Kilpatrick, William H., 252–253
- Kizevalter, Georgii, 4, 23–24, 36n42, 93, 102, 110, 118, 125, 156–157, 213n37, 214n39, 215, 230, 234n76, 258–260
- “knight’s move” (*khod konya*). See also Shklovsky, Viktor. 42
- Koldei. See also KD. 23n9, 25
- Komar, Vitaly, 38n49, 55, 58, 65, 68n51, 98, 119, 139, 223–224, 238
- Kordiashvili, Givi, 32
- Koselleck, Reinhart. See *Begriffsgeschichte*. 176
- Kosuth, Joseph, 35, 52, 119, 144, 170n144
- Kruchenykh Aleksei. See also *sdvig*. 71, 73n60, 173–174
- Kulik, Oleg, 38, 210
- Kurosawa, Akira. See *Rashomon*. 96
- labor (*as ponein*). See also Arendt, Hannah. 162–164
- laboring man (*animal laborans*), 162
- Laibach (group), 141–142
- left MOSKh, the. See also Moscow Artists Union. 27
- Leiderman, Yuri, 13, 31n33, 52n11, 55, 56n29, 276, 393
- Lenin, Vladimir, 139, 251
- Lerner, Daniel, 179
- Lianozovo (group), 149, 155
- Light (Blessed, Good, Gracious, Holy, Taboric), 76, 83, 86
- literal illustration and literal materialization. See also Gneздо. 98
- Lukács, György, 256, 280

- Mahayana Buddhism, 80
- Makarevich, Igor, 107, 110, 125, 156–157, 214n39, 215, 229n70, 230
- Malevich, Kazimir, 43, 71, 73–75, 84–86, 140, 173n2; *Black Square*, 43, 84–85, 140, 173n2; monochrome, 43, 74, 144; and Suprematism, 73n60, 85n87, 140; *White on White*, 140; and zero degree of form, 73, 85, 173n2, 196; and zero point of art, XV; 0.10 (exhibition), XIV
- managerial aesthetics. *See also* Buchloh, Benjamin, H. D. 169–170
- managerial revolution. *See also* Burnham, James. 170
- Marinetti, Filippo Tommaso, 61
- Marx, Karl, 187, 280
- Masiello, Francine. *See also* “art of transition.” 196
- Matiushin, Mikhail, 71
- McEvilly, Thomas, 235
- Medgerminevtika. *See* Inspection Medical Hermeneutics
- Melamid, Alexander, 38n49, 55, 58, 65, 68n51, 98, 119, 139, 223–224, 238
- Melville, Herman. *See Bartleby the Scrivener*
- Meszoly, Suzanne, 186
- metalanguage, 61
- MG. *See* Inspection Medical Hermeneutics
- Minimalism, 35, 191
- Mironenko, Vladimir and Sergey, 118n55
- Misiano, Viktor, 219–220
- von Mises, Ludwig, 194n40
- Moderns. *See also* Traditionals; Transitionals. 178–179
- modernists of the 1950s and 1960s, 7, 40, 42, 44, 64, 69, 74, 79, 86, 139, 216, 219, 279
- modernity, modernism, and modernization. *See also* Berman, Marshall. 177
- modernization theories. *See also* transition. 10, 176, 178–179
- Molchanova-Kabakova, Viktoria (*also* Vika), 127
- Monastyrsky, Andrei (Andrei Sumnin), *Dictionary of Moscow Conceptualism*, 7n9–10, 11, 45–46, 251, 277, 288; gap between art and life, 148, 151–152; *Journeys to the West* (installation), 230, 234–235, 238, 246, 254; *Kashirskoe Road* (novel), 68, 137; Soviet Conceptualism, 53; “Stages and Stops” (article), 137–138; transportation aesthetics, 133; “Water Margin of the Soviet Charisma” (article), 221
- monochromes, 43, 74
- de Montesquieu, Charles-Louis de Secondat, 183
- Moscow Artists Union. *See also* left MOSKh. 27
- Moscow Conceptualism, analytical conceptualism. *See also* romantic and inductive conceptualism. 58, 98; “angels of history,” 39n50, 41n58, 42n60, 45, 285; Anglo-American conceptualism, 35; apt-art, 39, 62; book after book principle, the, 78, 200; columbarium tablet. *See also* emptiness. 55; discursive field (of Moscow Conceptualism), 17–20, 22–23, 34, 37, 45, 48, 56, 61, 86; and Estonia (group), 57, 66; existential versus character (role-playing) conceptualists, 59; and Fenzo (group), 57n24; “field of consciousness” (of Moscow Conceptualism), 6 and Fourth Height, The (group), 57n24; generational divide within, 56; “golden book” of, 39n51, 44, 45n65, 61n34; “golden circle” of, 60; inductive conceptualism, 58; “in one’s mind” conceptualists, 59; Kabakov’s circle, 28, 65, 118; and KLAVA (Club of the Avantgardists), 62; language, “poetic” versus “rational,” 52; MANI (Moscow Archive of New Art), 31, 57, 62,

- 234n76, 282; MANI collection (*sbornik*), 31; and Inspection Medical Hermeneutics group, 37, 38n49, 211; Moksha, 57, 62, 277; Moscow Communal Conceptualism. *See also* Tupitsyn, Viktor. 56–57; Moscow Romantic Conceptualism. *See also* Groys, Boris. 3, 5, 6n5, 9, 25n14, 28–29, 39n50, 49–51, 55–56, 63, 72, 28; NOMA, 57, 62; origin of term “Moscow Conceptualism,” 20; “on their fingers” conceptualists, 60; “out of one’s mind” conceptualists, 59–60; paradigm shift in unofficial art of the seventies, 64–66, 70–71; and Piarnu (group), 57n24; “play beads” (introvert) versus “cast beads” (extrovert) conceptualists, 60; Psychedelic Conceptualism, 57–58, 137; *quid pro quo* principle. *See* “a instead of b.” 54; romantic and romanticism, 51, 63; Russian Conceptualism. *See also* Kabakov, Ilya. 53–54, 77, 106; Rutgers University. *See also* Dodge, Norton. 31, 50n7, 209n23; scientific positivism vs. mystical romanticism, 63; Soviet Conceptualism. *See also* Monastyrsky, Andrei. 53; “sub-depressive” versus “para-maniacal” conceptualists, 60; and Tartu (group), 57n24; tot-art, 62, 141
- Moscow noma. *See* Moscow Conceptualism: NOMA
- Moscow State University (MGU), 273
- Moulian, Tomás, 195
- Mukhomors (group), 27, 118
- Murzilka* (magazine), 318
- Museum of Contemporary Art (Tsaritsyno), 202
- National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), 286n18
- negation, aesthetics of, 86, 133
- Nekrasov, Vsevolod, 95
- Neo-Byzantines, 190
- netlenka*. *See also* *dukhovka*. 69n53
- New Academism, 190
- new thinking. *See also* Gorbachev, Mikhail. 180
- New York School, 70
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, 164n132
- nonconformist art. *See also* alternative art. 21, 29n28, 31, 50n7
- North Korean communism, 141
- Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Soviet Nonconformist Art, 31
- nothingness. *See also* emptiness; whiteness. 75, 84–86, 140
- Nouveau Réalisme, 50n4
- OBERIU, 41n57, 42, 106
- objectification, 120, 129, 132, 135, 161, 227, 279–282, 286n18
- objectivation, 280–282
- October Revolution, 148, 207n19, 228, 240, 251
- One and Three Chairs*. *See also* Kosuth, Joseph. 144
- Open Society and Its Enemies, The*. *See also* Popper, Karl. 186, 187n29
- Open Society Institute. *See also* Soros Foundation. 185–187, 192, 195n41, 199n2
- “Oriental Aesthetics.” *See also* Coomaraswamy, Ananda K. 264
- Paine, Thomas, 183
- Panitkov, Nikolai 4, 23n9, 31, 36n42, 156–157, 161, 210n26, 214–215, 219, 230, 234n76, 268–269, 273n156
- parallel polis. *See also* Benda, Václav. 6, 168

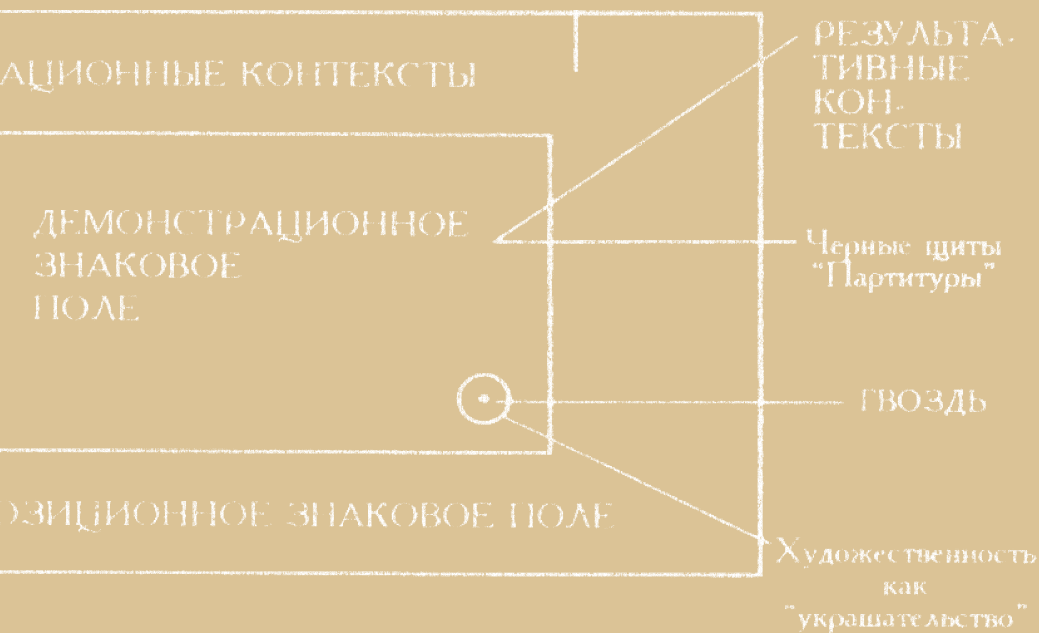
- Paris School, the 69
- Peirce, Charles Sanders, 235
- People's Choice*. *See also* Komar, Vitaly; Melamid, Alexander. 223
- Perestroika, 4, 138, 148–150, 152–154, 159, 223, 227, 251
- performative shift. *See also* Yurchak, Alexei, 66–67, 159–160, 169
- performative utterance. *See also* Austin, John, 66–67, 160
- Periclean *polis*, 164
- Pepperstein, Pavel, 57
- Peter the Great, 249
- Phenomenology of Spirit, The*. *See also* Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. 279
- philology, 17, 23, 62n37
- Picasso, Pablo, 237
- Pinochet, Augusto, 150, 195
- Pivovarov, Viktor, 38n49, 51n10, 69, 155n115, 221
- Plato, 187, 193
- pluralism, 251
- Pollock, Jackson, 240–241
- Popper, Karl, 186–187, 193
- Poem of the End*, 75
- political arithmetic. *See also* shopkeeper's arithmetic. 226
- Pop Art, 35, 139, 209
- postmodernism, 66, 136, 145, 200, 288
- post-Soviet period. *See* “after” period
- pre-art, 282
- pre-waiting. *See* Collective Actions group: Theory of Waiting
- Prigov, Dmitry, 36n42, 38n49, 118, 127–128, 245, 251
- privacy (*privatnost'*), 58–59
- private art. *See also* social art. 28, 58, 72, 151, 266, 275
- project, 230–231, 243–255
- project method. *See also* Dewey, John. 248, 252–253
- project, fundamental. *See also* Sartre, Jean-Paul. 251
- positivism, 51, 54, 63, 253
- pragmatism, 250–253
- Productivism, 228
- psychoanalysis, 70, 142, 208, 251
- purposeful act. *See also* pragmatism. 253
- rappels à l'ordre*, 190
- Rashomon* (film), 106
- Rauschenberg, Robert, 151, 153
- reification, 237, 279–284,
- repro-avant-garde. *See also* Helme, Sirje. 209
- Restless Heart Of Luis Corvalan, The*, 150
- Regina Gallery, 202
- “retrieval” and “catching up.” *See also* Habermas, Jürgen. 183, 191
- Robertson, William, 183
- Rodchenko, Alexander, 75
- Romanova, Lena, 273
- Romashko, Sergei, 107, 110, 215, 230
- Romanticism, 51, 63
- Roshal, Michael, 58n28, 98

- Rostow, Walt, 178
- Rubinstein, Lev, 23, 31, 38n49, 93, 102, 215
- Russia/West dichotomy, 208–209, 211
- Russian avant-garde, 7–8, 40–42, 44, 74, 144, 150, 196, 257, 249
- Russian idea. *See also sobornost'*. 208
- Russian new wave (exhibition), 29, 50n7
- Russian symbolism, 228
- Rustow, Dankwart, 179–180, 182
- Ryklin, Mikhail, 156–157, 205, 268, 270–271
- Salakhova, Aidan, 202
- Salinger, J. D., 81
- samizdat. *See also* MANI archive; MANI collection. 6n8, 23, 30–32, 93, 149, 168
- Sapgir, Genrikh, 106
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, 70, 84, 250–251
- Sasse, Sylvia, 37
- SCCA (Soros Centers for Contemporary Art), 10, 174, 184–195, 199, 205
- SCCA Moscow, 11, 205
- SCCA network. *See* Soros Centers for Contemporary Art network
- Scribe, Augustin Eugène and de Rougemont, Roger, 8
- sdvig*. *See also* *sdvigology*. 8, 72–73, 173–174, 196
- sdvigology*, 73n60, 174
- second Russian avant-garde, 42
- Sheptulin, N., 269
- Shklovsky, Viktor, 42
- shopkeeper's arithmetic. *See also* political arithmetic. 227
- shestidesyatniki*, 42, 69, 139
- Shvartsman, Mikhail, 75
- Sidur, Vadim, 27n22
- Sixth Festival of Youth and Students (Moscow, 1957), 6
- Skersis, Viktor, 58n28, 98
- Slavophiles. *See also* Westernizers. 56, 207n19, 208
- Sloterdijk, Peter, 141, 142n90
- Smirnova, Marina Aleksandrovna, 252n111
- Smith, Adam, 183, 194
- smuta* (trouble), 227–228
- sobornost'*, 208n20
- social art, 28, 151
- social function. *See also* aesthetic function. 28
- Socialist Realism, 40n54, 41, 72, 135, 151, 188n31, 237, 245, 279
- socialist plan. *See also* project. 244
- Sokov, Leonid. *See* *Restless Heart Of Luis Corvalan, The*. 150
- Solomon, Andrew, 34, 55n18, 71n57, 82n75, 122n56, 155, 175n147, 218n32, 238; Solovyov, Vladimir, 79
- Sooster, Ülo, 76n64
- Sorokin, Vladimir, 36n42, 214, 271
- Soros, George, 10, 174, 186
- Soros Centers for Contemporary Art network, 244n89, 288n20
- Soros Fine Arts Documentation Center, 186
- Soros Foundation Budapest, 186

- Sotheby's auction in Moscow, (1988), 32–34, 155, 157, 202, 209, 212
- Soviet period. *See* “before” period. 1, 5, 9, 20, 37, 39, 43, 50, 61, 89, 122, 161–162, 173, 205–206, 209, 213, 216, 218, 248, 254, 260, 261, 269, 274, 281
- Soviet Woodstock, 68
- Soviet vanguard art. *See also* alternative art. 38
- speech (and action as *praxis*), 37, 160, 163, 165, 166–168, 236
- stagnation (*zastoi*), 69
- Stalin, Joseph, 6, 27, 41, 66–67, 139, 142, 149, 159–160, 171, 184, 188n31
- Steinberg, Eduard, 51n10, 69n53, 75
- story (and action as *praxis*), 163, 165–169
- Suitzidov, I. *See also* Groys, Boris. 51n10
- suprematism. *See also* Malevich, Kazimir. 71n57, 73n60, 140
- “stagings” (*postanovka*). *See also* action. 25, 281
- Steuart, Sir James, 183
- Surrealism, 46, 62, 70
- Ten Characters*. *See also* Kabakov, Ilya. 77
- Ter-Oganian, Avdei, 232
- Thatcher, Margaret, 118
- Thayer, Willy, 195
- Tolstoy, Leo, 79
- Tönnies, Ferdinand, 218n50
- Total Art of Stalinism, The*. *See* Groys, Boris, 41
- total artistic action. *See* tot-art.
- totally administered society, 266
- Tot-Art (total artistic action), 62, 141
- transition. *See also* transitology.
 art of transition. *See also* Masiello, Francine, 196; capitalism by design, 184; closed and open society. *See also* Popper, Karl, 175, 187–189, 195; consolidation of democracy. *See also* normalization and post-transitology, 178, 183; cultural transitology, 10, 199; decade of transition, 3, 175; dynamic model and functionalist model, 180; epochal consciousness and epochal threshold. 176; functionalist model, 186; historicism. *See also* Popper, Karl, 149; impersonal institutions, 294; institutions and transition, 179, 181; modernization theories, 176, 178–179; normalization. *See also* post-transitology, 178, 183; outward preconditions. *See also* von Mises, Ludwig, 201; post-transitology. *See also* normalization, 194; Traditionals, 179; *transitio*, 199; transitional time, 176, 203; Transitionals, 179; transformation, 175, 178, 182; transformation studies, 175; transition to democracy (as slogan), 174, 179–180, 195; tribalism, 187
- Tupitsyn, Margarita, 29–30, 35, 40n53, 288n22
- Tupitsyn, Viktor, 22n7, 33n38, 34n39, 39n30, 40n53, 56, 62, 89, 140–141, 288n22
- tusovka*. *See also* Misiano, Viktor, 217–220
- Union of Polish Artists (ZPAP), 188n31
- unofficial art. *See also* alternative art, 5, 19, 21, 24, 27, 32–33, 50–51, 65, 68n51, 71, 149, 154, 202, 207, 209–210, 238, 243, 271, 279
- unengaged art. *See also* alternative art, 30
- underground (*podpol'nye*) art. *See also* alternative art, 98, 168

- un-hang-able (*nevyveshivaemye*) art.
See also alternative art, 65n46
- Unions of Artists. See Artists Unions.
- Urinal*. See also Duchamp, Marcel, 54
- USSR, collapse of, 4, 33, 207, 209
- Vasiliev, Oleg, 69, 76, 144
- VDNKh (Moscow Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy), 198, 124, 149, 221
- Venice Biennale, 24–25, 39, 49, 151n107
- Vico, Giambattista, 183
- Victory over the Sun* (opera), 71
- vita activa*. See also Arendt, Hannah, 162
- Vorkunst*. See pre-art. 282
- Vvedensky, Alexander, 106
- waiting. See Collective Actions group: Theory of Waiting.
- war of installation against painting, 242
- Warhol, Andy, 55
- Water Music*. See also Cage, John. 124
- Weber, Max, 228
- Wheeler, Britta, 286
- whiteness. See also emptiness. 74–77, 83, 86
- Weimar dada, 151
- West (as concept). See also Russia/West dichotomy, 207–208
- Westernizers. See also Slavophiles, 207n19
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 147
- wooden language (*langue de bois*), 67, 144, 152, 160, 285
- work (*rabota*). See also action, 25, 145
- work (as *poiēsis*) See also Arendt, Hannah, 162, 291–292
- workers and craftsmen (*homo faber*), 162, 280, 281n8
- Yakutia region, 258
- Yurchak, Alexei, 66, 159–160
- Zakharov, Vadim, 13, 31, 38n49, 44, 45n65, 58, 155
- zaum* poetry, 61, 73
- Zavadskaia, Evgenia, 80–82
- Zen Buddhism, 74, 78, 290n9
- zero degree of form, 73, 85, 173, 179n2, 196
- Zhdanovist doctrine. See also Socialist Realism, 279
- Zhigalov, Anatoly, 31, 141
- zones of accidental impressions. See Collective Actions group: undetermined zones.
- Zvezdochetov, Konstantin, 60, 118n55
- 0.10 exhibition. See also Malevich, Kazimir, XIV
- 01010101 (exhibition), 191
- 4'33." See also John Cage, 29, 129
- 24th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. See also developed socialism, 64
- 37 (journal), 50

The Eastern European transition from socialism to capitalism that began in the early 1990s radically altered the artistic practice of the unofficial artists who had emerged decades earlier in the shadow of state socialism. This volume seeks to understand the nature of these changes by closely following the evolution of Moscow Conceptualism and of the Moscow-based conceptual artist group Collective Actions in particular. Eşanu takes the history of this group as a case study to argue for a cultural or more specifically an artistic transition that unfolded in the background of the dominant economic and political one. The book performs a close reading of the Collective Actions group's ten-volume *Journeys Outside the City* and Andrei Monastyrsky's *Dictionary of Moscow Conceptualism*, revealing new artistic concerns and media as well as new modes of interaction among artists and their public. He follows the group through ten consecutive phases between 1975 and 2008, discussing the changes that occur in each new volume of the *Journeys* and comparing the Soviet volumes to those assembled after the dissolution of the USSR. The concept of "transition to democracy" is succinctly presented alongside the short-lived history of the Soros Centers for Contemporary Art—a pro-Western institutional mechanism implemented after 1989 to adjust the artistic practice of Eastern European artists to the logic of capitalist transition.



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